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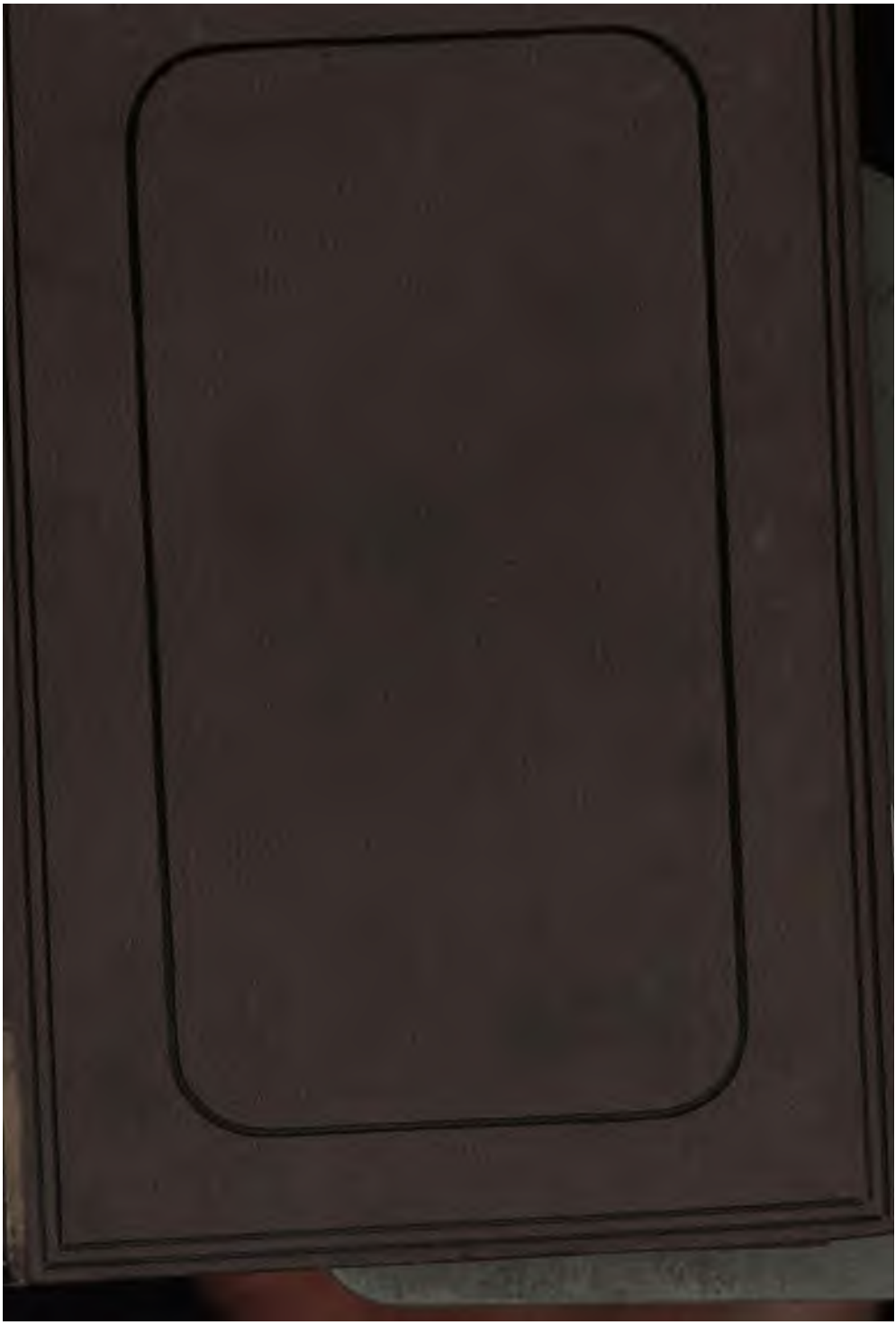

HE THAT WILL NOT WHEN HE MAY

HE THAT WILL NOT WHEN HE MAY

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOLUME III.

London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1880

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251. c. 152.

LONDON:
R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR,
BREAD STREET HILL.

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CHAPTER I.

It was late, quite late, when Mr. Gus was "got to go away." And it might have proved impossible altogether, but for some one who came for him and would not be denied. Mr. Scrivener was sitting alone with him in the library, from which all the others had gone, when this unknown summons arrived. The lawyer had done all he could to convince him that it was impossible he could remain; but Gus could not see the impossibility. He was hurt that they should wish him to go away, and still more hurt when the lawyer suggested that, in case of his claims being proved, Lady Markham would evacuate the house and leave it to him.

"What would she do that for?" Gus cried. "Did I come here to be left in a great desert all by myself? I won't let them go away."

Between these two determinations the lawyer did not know what to do. He was half-exasperated, half-amused, most reluctant to offend a personage who would have everything in his power as respected the little Markhams, and might make life so much happier, or more bitter, to all of them. He would not offend him for their sake, but neither could he let him take up his abode in the house and thus forestal all future settlement of the question. When the messenger came Mr. Scrivener was very grateful. It left him at liberty to speak with the others whose interests were much closer to his heart. To his surprise the person who came for Gus immediately addressed to him the most anxious questions about Lady Markham and Alice.

"I daren't ask to see them," this stranger said, who was half hidden in the obscurity of the night. "Will you tell them Edward Fairfax sends his—what do you call it?" said the young man—"duty, the poor people say: my most respectful duty. I stayed for to-day. I

should have liked to help to carry him, but I did not feel I had any right." His eyes glimmered in the twilight as eyes shine only through tears. "I helped to nurse him," he said in explanation, "poor old gentleman."

At this moment Gus, helped very obsequiously by Brown, who had got scent of something extraordinary in the air, as servants do, was getting himself into his overcoat.

"Have you anything to do with *him?*" the lawyer replied.

"No further than being in the inn with him. And I thought from what he said they might have a difficulty in getting him away. So I came to fetch him; but not entirely for that either," Fairfax said.

"Then you never did them a better service," said the lawyer, "than to-night."

"I don't think there is any harm in him," Fairfax said.

The lawyer shook his head. There might be no harm in him; but what harm was coming because of him! He said nothing, and Gus came out, buttoned up to the throat.

"You'll not go, I hope, till it is all settled," he said.

"Settled—it may not be settled for years!" cried the lawyer, testily. And then he turned to the other, who might be a confederate for anything he knew, standing out in the darkness, "What name am I to tell Lady Markham—Fairfax? Keep him away as long as you can," he whispered; "he will be the death of them." He thought afterwards that he was in some degree committing himself as allowing that Gus possessed the power of doing harm, which it would have been better policy altogether to deny.

Thus it was not till nightfall that the lawyer was able to communicate to his clients his real opinion. All the exhaustion and desire of repose which generally follows such a period of domestic distress had been made an end of by this extraordinary new event. Lady Markham was sitting in her favourite room, wrapped in a shawl, talking low with her brother and Alice, when Mr. Scrivener came in. He told them how it was that he had got free, and gave them the message Fairfax had sent. But it is to be feared that the devotion and delicacy of it suffered in transmission. It was his regards or his respects, and not his duty, which the

lawyer gave. What could the word matter? But he reported the rest more or less faithfully. "He thought there would be a difficulty in getting rid of our little friend," Mr. Scrivener said, "and therefore he came. It was considerate."

"Yes, it was very considerate," Lady Markham said, but, unreasonably, the ladies were both disappointed and vexed, they could not tell why, that their friend should thus make himself appear the supporter of their enemy. Their hearts chilled to him in spite of themselves. Paul had gone out; he was not able to bear any more of it; he could not rest. "Forgive my boy, Mr. Scrivener," his mother said; "he never was patient, and think of all he has lost."

"Mr. Paul," said the lawyer coldly, "might have endured the restraint for one evening, seeing I have waited on purpose to be of use to him."

The hearts of all three sank to their shoes when Mr. Scrivener, who was his adviser, his supporter, the chief prop he had to trust to—who had called the young man Sir Paul all the morning—thus changed his title. Lady Markham put out her hand and grasped his arm.

"You have given it up, then!" she said. "You have given it up! There is no more hope!"

And though he would not allow this, all that Mr. Scrivener had to say was the reverse of hopeful. He was aware of Sir William's residence in Barbadoes, which his wife had never heard of until the Lennys had betrayed it to her, and of many other little matters which sustained and gave consistence to the story of Gus. They sat together till late, going over everything, and before they separated it was tacitly concluded among them that all was over, that there was no more hope. The lawyer still spoke of inquiries, of sending a messenger to Barbadoes, and making various attempts to defend Paul's position. After all, it resolved itself into a question of Paul. Lady Markham could not be touched one way or another, and the fortunes of the children were secured. But Paul—how was Paul to bear this alteration in everything, this ruin of his life?

"It is all over now," Lady Markham said to her daughter, as after this long and terrible day they went up stairs together. "Whatever might have been, it is past hoping now. He will go with those people, and I shall never see my boy more."

What could Alice say? She cried, which seemed the only thing possible. There was no use in tears, but there is sometimes relief when no other outlet is possible. They wept together, thankful that at least there were two of them to mingle their tears. And Paul had not come in. He was wandering about the woods in the moonlight, not caring for anything, his head light, and his feet heavy. He had fallen, fallen, he scarcely knew where or when. Instead of the subdued and sad happiness of the morning, a sense of wounding and bruising and miserable downfall was in him and about him. He did not know where he was going, though he was acquainted with every glade and tangled alley of those familiar woods. Once (it was now September) he was seized by the gamekeepers, who thought him a poacher, and whose alarmed apologies and excuses when they discovered that it was Sir Paul, gave him a momentary sensation of self-disgust as if it were he who was the impostor. "I am not Sir Paul," was on his lips to say, but he did not seem to care enough for life to say it. One delusion more or less, what did it matter?

He walked and walked, till he was footsore with

fatigue. He went past the Markham Arms in the dark, and saw his supplanter through the inn window talking —to whom?—to Fairfax. What had Fairfax to do with it? Was it a scheme invented by Fairfax to humble him? Then the unhappy young fellow strayed to his father's grave, all heaped up and covered with the flowers that shone pale in the moonlight, quite detached from the surrounding graves and upturned earth. He sat down there, all alone in the silence of the world, and noticed, in spite of himself, how the night air moved the leaves and grasses, and how the moonlight slowly climbed the great slope of the skies. When the church tower came for a little while between him and the light, he shivered. He dropped his head into his hands and thought he slept. The night grew tedious to him, the darkness unendurable. He went away to the woods again, with a vague sense that to be taken for a poacher, or even shot by chance round the bole of a tree, would be the best thing that could happen. Neither Sir Paul nor any one—not even a poacher: what was he? A semblance, a shadow, a vain show—not the same as he who had walked with his face to heaven in the morning, and everything expanding,

opening out around him. In a moment they had all collapsed like a house of cards. He did not want to go home; home! it was not home—nor to see his mother, nor to talk to any one. The hoot of the owl, the incomprehensible stirring of the woods were more congenial to him than human voices. What could they talk about? Nothing but this on which there was nothing to say. Supplanted! Yes, he was supplanted, turned out of his natural place by a stranger. And what could he do? He could not fight for his inheritance, which would have been a kind of consolation —unless indeed it were a law-fight in the courts, where there would be swearing and counter-swearing, and all the dead father's life raked up, and perhaps shameful stories told of the old man who had to-day been laid in his grave with so much honour. This was the only way in which in these days a man could fight.

But it was only now and then, by intervals, that Paul's thoughts took any form so definite. He did not want to think. There was in him a vague and general sense of destruction—ruin, downfall, and humiliation which he could not endure. But, strangely enough, in all this he never thought of the plans which so short a

while ago he had considered as shaping his life. He did not think that now he could go back to them, and, free from all encumbrances of duty, pursue the way he had chosen. The truth was, he did not think of them at all. In the morning Spears and his colleagues had come to his mind as something from which he had escaped, but at night he did not think of them at all. They were altogether wiped out of his mind and obliterated by the loss of that which he had never possessed.

When he went home all the lights in the great house seemed extinguished save one candle which flickered in the hall window, and the light in his mother's room, which shone out like a star into the summer darkness. It was Alice who came noiseless, before he could knock, and opened the great door.

"Mamma cannot sleep till she has seen you," said the girl. "Oh, Paul, we must think of her now. I sent all the servants to bed. I have been watching for you at the window. I could not bear Brown and the rest to think that there was anything wrong."

"But they must soon know that everything is wrong. It is not a thing that can be hid."

"Perhaps it may be hid, Paul. It may turn out it is all a delusion—or an imposture."

"Let us go to my mother's room," said Paul.

He said nothing as he went up the stairs, but when he got to the landing he turned round upon the pale girl beside him carrying the light, whose white face illuminated by her candle made a luminous point in the gloom. He turned round to her all at once in the blackness of the great vacant place.

"It is no imposture; it is true. Whether we can bear it or not, it is true!"

"God will help us to bear it, Paul; if you will not desert us—if you will stay by us——"

"Desert you—was there ever any question of deserting you?" he said. He looked at his sister with a half-complaining curiosity and surprise, and shrugged his shoulders, so foolish did it sound to him. Then he took the candle from her hand, almost rudely, and walked before her to their mother's room. "You women never understand," he said.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER this a sudden veil and silence fell upon Markham. Nothing could be more natural than that this should be the case. Paul went to town with his uncle Fleetwood and the family lawyer, and shortly after the boys went back to school, and perfect silence fell upon the mourning house. The woods began to be touched by that finger of autumn which is chill rather than fiery, notwithstanding Mr. Tennyson—a yellow flag hung out here and there to warn the summer world, still in full brightness, of what was coming; but no crack of gun was to be heard among the covers. The county persistently and devotedly came to call, but Lady Markham was not yet able to see visitors. She was visible at church and sometimes driving, but never otherwise, which was all quite natural too, seeing that she was a

woman who had always been a tender wife. No whisper of any complication, of anything that made grief harder to bear had escaped from the house. Or so at least they thought who lived an anxious life there, not knowing what was to happen. But nevertheless by some strange magnetism in the air it was known from one end to another of the county that there was something mysterious going on. The servants had felt it in the air almost before the family themselves knew. When Brown helped "the little furrin gentleman" on with his coat on the evening of the funeral day do you think he did not know that this was his future master? The knowledge breathed even about the cottages and into the village, where generally the rustic public was obtuse enough in mastering any new fact. The young master who had been Sir Paul for one brief day sank into Mr. Paul again, nobody knowing how, and what was still more wonderful, nobody asking why. Among the higher classes there was more distinct curiosity, and many floating rumours. That there was a new claimant everybody was aware; and that there was to be a great trial unfolding all the secrets of the family for generations and showing a great many respectable personages to the

world in an entirely new light, most people hoped. It was generally divined and understood that the odd little foreigner (as everybody thought him) who had made himself conspicuous at the funeral, and whom many people had met walking about the roads, was the new heir. But how he came by his claim few people understood. Sir William was not the man to be the hero of any doubtful story, or to leave any uncertainty upon the succession to his property. This was just the one evil which no one, not even his political enemies, could think him capable of; therefore the imagination of his county neighbours threw itself further back upon his two brothers who had preceded him. Of these Sir Paul was known to have borne no spotless reputation in his youth, and even Sir Harry might have had antecedents that would not bear looking into. From one or other of these, the county concluded, and not through Sir William, this family misfortune must have come.

One morning during this interval, when Paul was absent and all the doings of the household at Markham were mysteriously hidden from the world, a visitor came up the avenue who was not of the usual kind. She seemed for some time very doubtful whether to go to

the great door, or to seek an entrance in a more humble way. She was a tall and slim young woman, dressed in a black alpacca gown, with a black hat and feather, and a shawl over her arm, a nondescript sort of person, not altogether a lady, yet whom Charles, the footman, contemplated more or less respectfully, not feeling equal to the impertinence of bidding her go round to the servants' door; for how could any one tell, he said? there were governesses and that sort that stood a deal more on their dignity than the ladies themselves. Mrs. Fry, who happened to see her from a window in the wing where she was superintending the great autumn cleaning in the nursery, concluded that it was some one come about the lady's-maid's place, for Alice's maid was going to be married. "But if you get it," said Mrs. Fry mentally, "I can tell you it's not long you'll go trolloping about with that long feather, nor wear a bit of a hat stuck on the top of your head." While, however, Mrs. Fry was forming this rapid estimate of her, Charles looked at the young person with hesitating respect, and behaved with polite condescension, coming forward as she approached. When she asked if she could see Lady Markham, Charles shook his head. "My lady don't see

nobody," he replied with an ease of language which was the first symptom he showed of feeling himself on an equality with the visitor. It was the tone of her voice which had produced this effect. Charles knew that this was not how a lady spoke.

"But she'll see me, if she knows who I am," said the girl. "I know she'll see me if you'll be so kind as to take up my name. Say Miss Janet Spears—as she saw in Oxford—"

"If you've come about the lady's-maid's place," said Charles, "there's our housekeeper, Mrs. Fry, she'll see you."

"I haven't come about no lady's-maid's place. You had better take up my name, or it will be the worse for you after," cried the girl angrily. She gave him such a look that Charles shook in his shoes. He begged her pardon humbly, and went off to seek Brown, leaving her standing at the door.

Then Brown came and inspected her from the further side of the hall. "I don't know why you should bother me, or me go and bother my lady," said Brown, not satisfied with the inspection; "take her to Missis Fry."

"But she won't go. It's my lady she wants, and just you look at her, what she wants she'll have, that's sure; she says it'll be the worse for us after."

"What name did you say?" asked Brown. "I'll tell Mrs. Martin, and she can do as she thinks proper." Mrs. Martin was Lady Markham's own maid. Thus it was through a great many hands that the name of Janet Spears reached Lady Markham's seclusion. Charles was very triumphant when the message reached him that the young person was to go up stairs. "I told you," he said to Mr. Brown. But Brown on his part was satisfied to know that it was only "a young person," not a lady, whom his mistress admitted. His usual discrimination had not deserted him. As for Janet, the great staircase overawed her more than even the exterior of the house; the size and the grandeur took away her breath; and though she felt no respect for Charles, the air as of a dignified clergyman with which Mr. Brown stepped out before her, to guide her to Lady Markham's room, not deigning to say anything, impressed her more than words could tell. No clergyman she had ever encountered had been half so imposing; though Janet from a general desire to better herself

in the world, and determination not to lower herself to the level of her father's companions, had always been a good churchwoman and eschewed Dissenters. But Mr. Brown, it may well be believed, in the gloss of his black clothes and the perfection of his linen, was not to be compared with a hardworking parish priest exposed to all weathers. By the time she had reached Lady Markham's door her breath was coming quick with fright and excitement. Lady Markham herself had made no such strong impression. Her dress had not been what Janet thought suitable for a great lady. She had felt a natural scorn for a woman who, having silks and satins at her command, could come out in simple stuff no better than her own. Mrs. Martin, however, had a black silk which "could have stood alone," and everything combined to dazzle the rash visitor. Now that she had got so far her knees began to tremble beneath her. Lady Markham was standing awaiting her, in deep mourning, looking a very different person from the beautiful woman whom Janet had seen standing in the sunshine in her father's shop. She made a step forward to receive her visitor, a movement of anxiety and eagerness; then waited till the door was shut upon

her attendant. "You have come—from your father?" she said.

"No, my lady." Now that it had come to the point Janet felt an unusual shyness come over her. She cast down her eyes and twisted her fingers round the handle of the umbrella she carried. "My father was away: I had a day to spare: and I thought I'd come and ask you——"

"Do not be afraid. Tell me what it is you want; is it——" Lady Markham hesitated more than Janet did. Was it something about Paul? What could it be but about Paul? but she would not say anything to open that subject again.

"It is about Mr. Paul, my lady. There isn't any reason for me to hesitate. It was you that first put it into my head——"

Now it was Lady Markham's turn to droop. "I am very sorry," she said involuntarily. "I was—misled——"

"Oh, I don't know as there's anything to be sorry about. Mr. Paul—I suppose he is Sir Paul, now?"

As Janet's gaze, no longer shy, dwelt pointedly on her dress by way of justifying the question, Lady Markham

shrank back a little. "It is not—quite settled," she said faintly; "there are some—unexpected difficulties."

"Oh!" Janet's eyes grew round as her exclamation, an expression of surprise and profound disappointment went over her face. "Will he not be a baronet then, after all?" she said.

"These are family matters which I have not entered into with any one," said Lady Markham, recovering herself. "I cannot discuss them now—unless——" here her voice faltered, "you have any right——"

"I should think a girl just had a right where all her prospects are concerned," said Janet. "It was that brought me here. I wanted you to know, my lady, that I've advised Mr. Paul against it—against the emigration plan. If he goes it won't be to please me. I don't want him to go. I don't want to go myself—and that's what I've come here for. If so be," said Janet, speaking deliberately, "as anything is to come of it between him and me, I should be a deal happier and a deal better pleased to stay on at home; and I thought if you knew that you'd give up opposing. I've said it to him as plain as words can say. And if he will go, it will be your blame and not mine. It will be because he

thinks you've set your face so against it, that *that's* the only way."

Lady Markham trembled so much that she could not stand. She sank down upon a chair. "Pardon me," she said involuntarily, "I have not been well."

"Oh, don't mention it, my lady," said Janet, taking a chair too. "I was just a going to ask you if you wouldn't sit down and make yourself comfortable." She had got over her shyness; but that which liberated her threw Lady Markham into painful agitation. It seemed to her that she had the fate of her son thrown back into her hands. If she withdrew all opposition to this marriage, would he indeed give up his wild ideas and stay at home? If she opposed it, would he persevere? and how could she oppose anything he had set his heart upon after all he had to renounce on his side, poor boy? She did not know how to reply or how to face such a dilemma. To help to make this woman Paul's wife—or to lose Paul altogether—what a choice it was to make! Her voice was choked by the fluttering of her heart.

"My son," she said, faintly, "has never spoken to me on the subject."

"It is not likely," said Janet, "when he knows he would meet with nothing but opposition. For my part I'm willing, very willing, to stay at home. I never went in with the emigration plan. Father is a good man, and very steady, and has been a good father to us; but whenever it comes to planning, there's no telling the nonsense he's got in his head."

"Does your father know that you have come to see me?" Lady Markham said. With Spears himself she had some standing-ground. She knew how to talk to the demagogue, understood him, and he her; but the young woman she did not understand. Paul's mother, notwithstanding all her experience, was half afraid of this creature, so straightforward, so free of prejudice, so —sensible. Yes, it was sense, no doubt. Janet did not want to go away. She had no faith in her father, nor in the man who was going, she hoped, to be her husband. Lady Markham, herself capable of enthusiasm and devotion, and who could so well, in her maturity, have understood the folly of a girl ready to follow to the end of the world for love, was almost afraid of Janet. She was cowed by her steady look, the bargain she evidently wished to make. She took refuge

as it were, in Spears, mentally appealing to him in her heart.

"No," said Janet, "no one knows. He is away from home on one of his speechifyings. Don't think I hold with that, my lady. England's good enough for me, and things as they are; and if so be as you will make up your mind not to go against us, Mr. Paul shall never go to foreign parts through me. But he is Sir Paul, ain't he?" the young woman said.

"I will do nothing—to make my son unhappy," said Lady Markham. How could she help but sigh to think that this was the woman that could make him happy? "He is not at home," she added with a tone of relief.

"But he is Sir Paul? What is the good of deceiving me, when I can hear from any one—the gentleman down stairs, or any one."

"Is there a gentleman down stairs?" Lady Markham thought some one must have come bringing news, perhaps, while she was shut up here.

Janet blushed crimson. Now she had indeed made a mistake. She avoided all reply which might have led to the discovery that Brown was the

gentleman she meant; but this glaring error made her humbler.

"You are very kind, my lady, to speak so reasonable," she said. "And if you like to tell Mr. Paul that I'm as set against emigration as you are—I am not one that will be put upon," said Janet; "but if we're both to be the same, you and me, both Lady Markhams," here she paused a moment to draw a long breath, half overcome by the thought which in this scene became so dazzlingly real and possible, "I think it would be a real good thing if we could be friends."

This thought, which fluttered Janet, made Lady Markham faint. The blood seemed to ebb away from her heart as she heard these words. She could not make any reply. It was true enough what the girl said, and if she should ever be Paul's wife, no doubt his mother would be bound to be her friend. But she could not speak in reply. There was a pause. And Janet looked round the richly-furnished, luxurious room which was not indeed by any means so fine as she would have thought natural, with much curiosity and interest. The sight of all its comforts revealed to her the very necessities they were intended to supply, and

which had no existence in her primitive state. Janet was not unreasonable. She was content with the acquiescence she had elicited. Lady Markham had not resisted her nor denounced her, as it was quite on the cards that she might have done. "You have a very grand house, and a beautiful place here, my lady," she said. Lady Markham, more than ever subdued, made a faint sound of assent in reply. "I should like to see over it," Janet said.

"Miss—Spears!"

"Oh, I don't mind, if you would rather not! Some people don't like them that is to come after them. I have said all I came to say, my lady. So perhaps I had better just say good-bye."

And Janet rose and put forth a moist hand in a black glove. She had got these black gloves and the hat out of compliment to the family. Never had a friendly and hospitable woman been in a greater difficulty. "I am not seeing any one," Lady Markham faltered; "but—should you not like some refreshment before you go?'

Janet paused. She would have liked to have eaten in such a house. What they eat there must be different

from the common fare with which she was acquainted, and a man in livery to wait behind her chair was an idea which thrilled her soul; but when Lady Markham rang the bell, and ordered Mrs. Martin to have a tray brought up stairs, she started in high offence.

"No, my lady; if I'm not good enough to take my meals with you, I'll have nothing in this house," she cried, and flounced indignant out of the room. This was the summary end of the first visit paid to Markham by Janet Spears.

CHAPTER III.

THE day after Paul's departure for London with his lawyer and his uncle, Mr. Gus left the Markham Arms. By a fatality Fairfax thought, he too was going away at the same time. He had gone up to Markham in the morning early for no particular reason. He said to himself that he wanted to see the house of which he had so strangely become an inmate for a little while and then had been swept out of, most probably for ever. To think that he knew all those rooms as familiarly as if they belonged to him, and could wander about them in his imagination, and remember whereabouts the pictures hung on the walls, and how the patterns went in the carpet, and yet never had seen them a month ago, and never might see them

again! It is a strange experience in a life when this happens, but not a very rare one. Sometimes the passer-by is made for a single evening, for an hour or two, the sharer of an existence which drops entirely into the darkness afterwards, and is never visible to him again. Fairfax asked himself somewhat sadly if this was how it was to be. He thought that he would never in his life forget one detail of those rooms, the very way the curtains hung, the covers on the tables: and yet they could never be anything to him except a picture in his memory, hanging suspended between the known and the unknown. The great door was open as he had known it ("It is always open," he said to himself), and all the windows of the sitting-rooms, receiving the full air and sunshine into them. But up stairs the house was not yet open. Over some of the windows the curtains were drawn. Where they still sleeping, the two women who were in his thoughts? He cared much less in comparison for the rest of the family. Paul, indeed, being in trouble, had been much in his mind as he came up the avenue; but Paul had not been here when Fairfax

had lived in the house, and did not enter into his recollections; and Paul he knew was away now. But the two ladies—Alice, whom he had been allowed to spend so many lingering hours with, whom he had told so much about himself—and Lady Markham, whom he had never ceased to wonder at; they had taken him into the very closest circle of their friendship; they had said "Go," and he had gone; or "Come," and he had always been ready to obey. And now was he to see no more of them for ever? Fairfax could not but feel very melancholy when this thought came into his mind. He came slowly up the avenue, looking at the old house. The old house he called it to himself, as people speak of the home they have loved for years. He would never forget it though already perhaps they had forgotten him. His foot upon the gravel caught the ear of Mr. Brown, who came to the door and looked out curiously. When things of a mysterious character are happening in a house the servants are always vigilant. Brown came down stairs early; he suffered no sound to pass unnoticed. And now he came out into the early sunshine, and looked about like a man determined to let nothing escape him. And the sight of Fairfax

was a welcome sight, for was not he "mixed up" with the whole matter, and probably able to throw light upon some part of it, could he be got to speak.

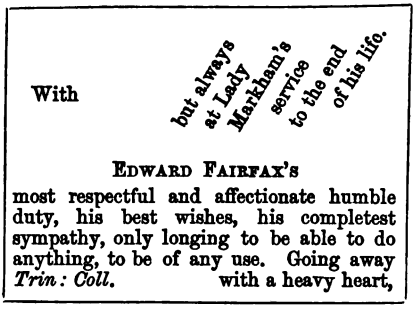
"I hope I see you well, sir," said Mr. Brown. "This is a sad house, sir—not like what it was a little time ago. We have suffered a great affliction, sir, in the loss of Sir William."

"I am going away, Brown," said Fairfax. "I came up to ask for the ladies. Tell me what you can about them. How is Lady Markham? She must have felt it terribly, I fear."

"Yes, sir, and all that's happened since," said Brown. "A death, sir, is a thing we must all look forward to. That will happen from time to time, and nobody can say a word; but there's a deal happened since, Mr. Fairfax—and that do try my lady the worst of all."

Fairfax did not ask what had happened, which Mr. Brown very shrewdly took as conclusive that he knew all about it. He said half to himself, "I will leave a card, though that means nothing;" and then he mused long over the card, trying to put more than a message

ever contained into the little space at his disposal. This was at last what he produced—


With but always at Lady Markham's service to the end of his life.

EDWARD FAIRFAX'S

most respectful and affectionate humble duty, his best wishes, his completest sympathy, only longing to be able to do anything, to be of any use. Going away *Trin: Coll.* with a heavy heart,

When he had written this—and only when he had written it—it occurred to him how much better it would have been to have written a note, and then he hesitated whether to tear his card in pieces; but on reflection, decided to let it go. He thought the crowded lines would discourage Brown from the attempt to decipher it.

"You will give them that, and tell them—but there is no need for telling them anything," Fairfax said with a sigh.

"You are going away, sir?"

"Yes, Brown"—he said, confidentially, "directly,"

feeling as if he could cry; and Brown felt for the poor young fellow. He thought over the matter for a moment, and reflected that if things were to go badly for the family, it would be a good thing for Miss Alice to have a good husband ready at hand. Various things had given Brown a high opinion of Fairfax. There were signs about him—which perhaps only a person of Mr. Brown's profession could fully appreciate—of something like wealth. Brown could scarcely have explained to any one the grounds on which he built this hypothesis, but all the same he entertained it with profound conviction. He eyed the card with great interest, meaning to peruse it by and by; and then he said—

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I think Miss Alice is just round the corner, with the young ladies and the young gentlemen. You won't mention, sir, as I said it—but I think you'll find them all there."

Fairfax was down the steps in a moment; but then paused:

"I wonder if it will be an intrusion," he said; then he made an abject and altogether inappropriate appeal, "Brown! do you think I may venture, Brown?"

"I would, sir, if I was you," said that personage with a secret chuckle, but the seriousness of his countenance never relaxed. He grinned as the young man darted away in the direction he had pointed out. Brown was not without sympathy for tender sentiments. And then he fell back upon those indications already referred to. A good husband was always a good thing, he said to himself.

And Fairfax skimmed as if on wings round the end of the wing to a bit of lawn which they were all fond of—where he had played with the boys and talked with Alice often before. When he got within sight of it, however, he skimmed the ground no longer. He began to get alarmed at his own temerity. The blackness of the group on the grass which he had seen only in their light summer dresses gave him a sensation of pain. He went forward very timidly, very doubtfully. Alice was standing with her back towards him, and it was only when he was quite near that she turned round. She gave a little startled cry—"Mr. Fairfax!" and smiled; then her eyes filled with tears. She held out one hand to him and covered her face with the other. The little girls seeing this began to cry too. For the moment it

was their most prevailing habit. Fairfax took the outstretched hand into both his, and what could he do to show his sympathy but kiss it?—a sight which filled Bell and Marie with wonder, seeing it, as they saw the world in general, through that blurred medium of tears.

"I could not help coming," he said, "forgive me! just to look at the windows. I know them all by heart. I had no hope of so much happiness as to see—any one; but I could not—it was impossible to go away—without——"

Here they all thought he gave a little sob too, which said more than words, and went to their hearts.

"But, Mr. Fairfax," said Bell, "you were here before—"

"Yes; I could not go away. I always thought it possible that there might be some errand—something you would tell me to do. At all events I must have stayed for——"

The funeral he would have added. He could not but feel that though Alice had given him her hand, there was a little hesitation about her.

"But, Mr. Fairfax," Bell began again, "you were

staying at the inn with—the little gentleman. Don't you know he is our enemy now?"

"I don't think he is your enemy," Fairfax said—which was not at all what he meant to say.

"Hush, Bell, that was not what it was; only mamma thought—and I—that poor Paul was your friend and that you would not have put yourself—on the other side."

"*I* put myself on the other side!" cried the young man. "Oh, how little you know! I was going to offer to go out to that place myself to make sure, for it does not matter where I go. I am not of consequence to any one like Paul; but——"

"But—what?"

Alice half put out her hand to him again.

"You will not think this is putting myself on the other side. It all looks so dreadfully genuine," said Fairfax, sinking his voice.

Only Alice heard what he said. She was unreasonable, as girls are.

"In that case we will not say anything more on the subject, Mr. Fairfax; you cannot expect us to agree with you," she said. "Good-bye. I will tell mamma you have called."

She turned away from him as she spoke, then cast a glance at him from under her eyelids, angry yet relenting. They stood for a moment like the lovers in Molière, eying each other timidly, sadly—but there was no one to bring them together, to say the necessary word in the ear of each. Poor Fairfax uttered a sigh so big that it seemed to move the branches round. He said—

"Good-bye then, Miss Markham; won't you shake hands with me before I go?"

"Good-bye," said Alice faintly. She wanted to say something more, but what could she say? Another moment and he was gone altogether, hurrying down the avenue.

"Oh, how nasty you were to poor Mr. Fairfax," cried Bell. "And he was always so kind. Don't you remember, Marie, how he ran all the way in the rain to fetch the doctor? even George wouldn't go. He said he couldn't take a horse out, and was frightened of the thunder among the trees; but Mr. Fairfax only buttoned his coat and flew."

"The boys said," cried little Marie, "that they were sure he would win the mile—in a moment——"

"Oh, children," cried Alice, "what do you know about it? you will break my heart talking such nonsense —when there is so much trouble in the house. I am going in to mamma."

But things were not much better there, for she found Lady Markham with Fairfax's card in her hand, which she was reading with a great deal of emotion. "Put it away with the letters," Lady Markham said. They had kept all the letters which they received after Sir William's death by themselves in the old despatch-box which had always travelled with him wherever he went, and which now stood—with something of the same feeling which might have made them appropriate the greenest paddock to his favourite horse—in Lady Markham's room. Some of them were very "beautiful letters." They had been dreadful to receive morning by morning, but they were a kind of possession—an inheritance now.

"Put it with the letters," Lady Markham said; "any one could see that his very heart was in it. He knew your dear father's worth; he was capable of appreciating him; and he knows what a loss we have had. Poor boy—I will never forget his kindness—never as long as I live."

"But, mamma," said Alice, loyal still though her heart was melting, "you know you thought it very strange of Mr. Fairfax to take that horrid little man's part against Paul."

"I can't think he did anything of the sort," Lady Markham said, but she would not enter into the question.

It was not wonderful, however, if Alice was angry. She had sent him away because of the general family anger against him; and lo, nobody seemed to feel that anger except herself.

But it may be easily understood how Fairfax felt it a fatality when he found Gus's portmanteaux packed, and himself awaiting his return to go by the same train.

"Why should I stay here?" he said. "I did not come to England to stay in a village inn. I will go with you, and go to that lawyer, and get it all settled. Why should they make such a fuss about it? I mean no one any harm. Why can't they take to me and make me one of the family? except that I should be there instead of my poor father, I don't know what difference it need make."

"But that makes a considerable difference," said Fairfax. "You must perceive that."

"Of course it makes a difference; between father and son there is always a difference—but less with me than with most people. I do not want to marry, for instance. Most men marry when they come into their estates. There was once a girl in the island," said Gus, with a sigh; "but things were going badly, and she married a man in the Marines. No, if they will consent to consider me as one of the family—I like the children, and Alice seems a nice sort of girl, and my stepmother a respectable motherly woman——, eh?"

Some hostile sound escaped from Fairfax which made the little gentleman look up with great surprise. He had not a notion why his friend should object to what he said.

But the end was that the two did go to town together, and that it was Fairfax who directed this enemy of his friends' where to go, and how to manage his business. Gus was perfectly helpless, not knowing anything about London, and would have been as likely to settle himself in Fleet Street as in Piccadilly—perhaps more so. Fairfax could not get rid of his companion till he had

put him in communication with the lawyer, and generally looked after all his affairs. For himself nothing could be more ill-omened. He went about asking himself what would the Markhams think of him?—and yet what could he do? Gus's mingled perplexity and excitement in town were amusing, but they were embarrassing too. He wanted to go and see the Tower and St. Paul's. He wanted Fairfax to tell him exactly what he ought to give to every cabman. He stood in the middle of the crowd in the streets folding his arms, and resisting the stream which would have carried him one way or the other.

"You call this a free country, and yet one cannot even walk as one likes," he said. "Why are these fellows jostling me; do they want to rob me?"

Fairfax did not know what to do with the burden thus thrown on his hands.

And it may be imagined what the young man's sensations were, when having just deposited Gus in the dining-room of one of the junior clubs of which he was a member, he met Paul upon the steps of the building coming in. Paul was a member too. Fairfax was driven to his wits' end. The little gentleman was

tired, and would not budge an inch until he had eaten his luncheon and refreshed himself. What was to be done? Paul was not too friendly even to himself.

"Are you here, too, Markham? I thought there was nobody in London but myself," Fairfax said.

"There are only a few millions for those who take them into account; but some people don't——"

"Oh, you know what I mean," Fairfax said. And then they stood and looked at each other. Paul was pale. His mourning gave him a formal look, not unlike his father. He had the air of some young official on duty, with a great deal of unusual care and responsibility upon him.

"You look as if you were the head of an office," said Fairfax, attempting a smile.

"It would not be a bad thing," said the other languidly; "but the tail would be more like it than the head. I must do something of that kind."

"Do you mean that you are going into public life?"

"That depends upon what *you* mean by public life," said Paul. "I am not, for instance, going into Parliament, though there were thoughts of that once;

but I have got to work, my good fellow, though that may seem odd to you."

"To work!" Fairfax echoed with dismay; which dismay was not because of the work, but because the means of getting him out of the place, and out of risk of an encounter with Gus, became less and less every moment. Paul laughed with a forced and theatrical laugh. In short, he was altogether a little theatrical—his looks, his dress, everything about him. In the excess of his determination to bear his downfall like a man, he was playing with exaggerated honesty the part of a fallen gentleman and ruined heir.

"You think that very alarming then? but I assure you it depends altogether on how you look at it. My father worked incessantly, and it was his glory. If I work, not as a chief, but as an underling, it will not be a bit less honourable."

"Markham, can you suppose for a moment that I think it less honourable?" said Fairfax; "quite otherwise. But does it mean——? Stop, I must tell you something before I ask you any questions. That little beggar who calls himself your brother——"

"I believe he is my brother," said Paul, formally;

and then he added with another laugh: "that is the noble development to which the house of Markham has come."

"He is there. Yes, in the dining-room, waiting for his luncheon. One moment, Markham!—we were at the inn in the village together, and he has hung himself on to me. What could I do? he knew nothing about London; he is as helpless as a baby. And the ladies," said Fairfax, his countenance changing, "the ladies—take it as a sign that I am siding with him against you."

He felt a quiver come over his face like that of a boy who is complaining of ill-usage, and for the moment could scarcely subdue a rueful laugh at his own expense; but Paul laughed no more. He became more than ever like the head of an office, too young for his post, and solemnised by the weight of it. His face shaped itself into still more profound agreement with the solemnity of those black clothes.

"Pardon me, my good fellow," he said. Paul was not one of the men to whom this mode of address comes natural. There was again a theatrical heroism in his look. "Pardon me; but in such a matter as this I

don't see what your siding could do for either one or the other. It is fact that is in question, nothing else."

And with a hasty good day he turned and went down the steps where they had been talking. Fairfax was left alone, and never man stood on the steps of a club and looked out upon the world and the passing cabs and passengers with feelings more entirely uncomfortable. He had not been unfaithful in a thought to his friend, but all the circumstances were against him. For a few minutes he stood and reflected what he should do. He could not go and sit down at table comfortably with the unconscious little man who had made the breach; and yet he could not throw him over. Finally he sent a message by one of the servants to tell Gus that he had been called unexpectedly away, and set off down the street at his quickest pace. He walked a long way before he stopped himself. He was anxious to make it impossible that he should meet either Gus again or Paul. Soon the streets began to close in. A dingier and darker part of London received him. He walked on, half interested, half disgusted. How seldom, save perhaps in a hansom driven at full speed, had he ever traversed those streets leading one

out of another, these labyrinths of poverty and toil. As he went on, thinking of many things that he had thought of lightly enough in his day, and which were suggested by the comparison between the region in which he now found himself and that which he had left —the inequalities and unlikeness of mankind, the strange difference of fate—his ear was suddenly caught by the sound of a familiar voice. Fairfax paused, half thinking that it was the muddle in his mind, caused by that association of ideas with the practical drama of existence in which he found himself involved, which suggested this voice to him; but looking round he suddenly found himself, as he went across one of the many narrow streets which crossed the central line of road, face to face with the burly form of Spears.

CHAPTER IV.

"You here, too," said the demagogue; "I thought this was a time when all you fine folks were enjoying yourselves, and London was left to the toilers and moilers."

"Am I one of the fine folks? I am afraid that proves how little you know of them, Spears."

"Well, I don't pretend to know much," said Spears. "Markham's here, too. And what is all this about Markham? I don't understand a word of it."

"What is about him?"

Fairfax was determined to breathe no word of Paul's altered circumstances to any one, sheltering himself under the fact that he himself knew nothing definite. The orator looked at him with a gaze which it was difficult to elude.

"I thought you had been with the family at that grand house of theirs? However! Paul was hot upon our emigration scheme, you know; he would hear no reason on that subject. I warned him that it was not a thing for men like him, with soft hands and muscles unstrung; but he paid me no attention. There was another thing, I believe, a secondary motive," said Spears, with a wave of his hand, "a thing that never would have come into my head, which his mother found out—the kind of business that women do find out. Well! His father is dead, and I suppose he has come into the title and all that. But here's the rub. We are within a fortnight of our start, and never another word from Paul. What does he mean by it? has he been persuaded by the women? has he thrown us overboard and gone in for the old business of landlord and aristocrat? I have told him many a time it was in his blood; but never was there one more hot for better principles. Now look here, Fairfax, you're not the man to pretend ignorance. What do you know?"

"Nothing but that Sir William is dead."

"Sir William is dead, that means, long live Sir Paul: *lay roy est mortt, veeve lay roy*," said Spears, with honest

English pronunciation. "Yes, the papers would tell you that. If he's going to give it all up," he went on, a deep colour coming over his face, "I sha'n't be surprised. I don't say that I'll like it, but I sha'n't be surprised. A large property—and a title—may be a temptation: but in that case it's his duty to let us know. I suppose you and he see each other sometimes?"

"By chance we have met to-day."

"By chance? I thought you were always meeting. Well, what does he mean? I acknowledge," said Spears, with very conscious satire, "that a Sir Paul in our band will be an oddity. It wouldn't be much more wonderful if it was St. Paul," he added, with a laugh; "but one way or other I must know. And I don't mind confessing to you," he said, turning into the way by which Fairfax seemed to be walking, and suddenly striking him on the shoulder with an amicable but not slight blow, "that it will be a disappointment. I had rather committed the folly of setting my heart on that lad. He was the kind of thing, you know, that we mean in our class when we say a gentleman. There's you, now, you're a gentleman, too; but I make little account of you. You might just as well have been brought up in

my shop or in trade. But there's something about Paul, mind you—that's where it is; he's got that grand air, and that hot-headed way. I hate social distinctions, but he's above them. The power of money is to me like a horrible monster, but he scorns it. Do you see what I mean? A man like me reasons it all out, and sees the harm of it, and the devilry of it, and it fires his blood. But Paul, he holds his head in the air, and treats it like the dirt below his feet. That's fine, that takes hold of the imagination. I don't mean to hurt your feelings, Fairfax," said Spears, giving him another friendly tap on the shoulder, "but you're just a careless fellow, one thing doesn't matter more than another to you."

"Quite true. I am not offended," said Fairfax, laughing. "You discriminate very well, Spears, as you always do."

"Yes, I suppose I have a knack that way," said the demagogue, simply. "I shouldn't wonder," he added, "though it is not a subject that a man can question his daughter about, that it was just the same thing that attracted my girl."

Fairfax turned round upon him with quick surprise;

he had not heard anything about Janet. "What!" he said, "has Markham——" and then paused; for Spears, though indulgent to freedom of speech, was in this one point a dangerous person to meddle with. He turned round, with all the force of his rugged features and broad shoulders, and looked the questioner in the face.

"Yes," he said, "Markham has—a fancy for my Janet. There is nothing very wonderful in that. His mother tried to persuade me that this was the entire cause of his devotion to my principles and me. But that is a way women have. They think nothing comparable to their own influence. He satisfied me as to that. Yes," said Spears, with a softened, meditative tone, "that is the secondary motive I spoke of; and, to tell the truth, when I heard of the old fellow's death I was sorry. I said to myself, the girl will never be able to resist the temptation of being 'my lady.'"

A smile began to creep about the corners of his mouth. For himself, it is very likely that Spears would have had virtue enough to carry out his own principles and resist all bribes of rank had they been thrown in his way; but he contemplated the possible elevation of his child with a tender sense of the wonderful, and the

ludicrous, and incredible which melted all sterner feelings. The idea that Janet might be "my lady" filled him with a subdued pleasure and amusement, and a subtle pride which veiled itself in the humour of the notion. It made him smile in spite of himself. As for Fairfax, this had so completely taken his breath away that he seemed beyond the power of speech, and Spears went on musingly for a minute or two walking beside him, his active thoughts lulled by the fantastic pleasure of that vision, and the smile still lingered about his closely-shut lips. At last he started from the weakness of this reverie.

"There is to be a meeting to-night," he said, "down in one of these streets—and I'm going to give them an address. I've got the name of the street here in my pocket and the house and all that—if you like to come."

"Certainly I will come," said Fairfax with alacrity. He had not much to occupy his evenings, and he took a kind of careless speculative interest, not like Paul's impassioned adoption of the scheme and all its issues, in Spears's political crusade. The demagogue patted him on the shoulders once more as he left him. He had always half-patronised, half stood in awe of Fairfax,

whose careless humour sometimes threw a passing light of ridicule even on the cause. "If you see Markham, bring him along with you; and tell him I must understand what he means," he said.

But Fairfax did not see Paul again. He did not indeed put himself in the way of Paul, though his mind was full of him, for the rest of the day. Janet Spears was a new complication in Paul's way. The whole situation was dreary and hopeless enough. His position as head in his house and family, the importance, his wealth, his power of influencing others, all taken from him in a day, and Spears's daughter—Janet Spears—hung round his neck like a millstone. Paul! of all men in the world to get into such a vulgar complication, Paul was about the last. And yet there could be no mistake about it. Fairfax, who honestly felt himself Paul's inferior in everything, heard this news with the wondering dismay of one whose own thoughts had taken a direction as much above him (he thought) as the other's was beneath him. With a painful flush of bewilderment, he thought of himself floated up into regions above himself into a different atmosphere, another world, by means of the woman who

had been Paul's companion all his life, while Paul—— He had heard of such things; of men falling into the mire out of the purest places, of rebellions from the best to the worst. They were common enough. But that it should be *Paul!*

When evening came he took his way to the crowded quarter where he had met Spears, and to the meeting, which was held in a back room in an unsavoury street. It had begun to rain, the air was wet and warm, the streets muddy, the floor of the room black and stained with many footsteps. There was a number of men packed together in a comparatively small space, which soon became almost insupportable with the flaring gas-lights, the odour from their damp clothes, and their breath. At one end of it were a few men seated round a table, Spears among them. Fairfax could only get in at the other end, and close to the door, which was the saving of him. He exercised politeness at a cheap cost by letting everybody who came penetrate further than he. Some of the men looked at him with suspicion. He had kept on his morning dress, but even that was very different from the clothes they wore. They were not very penetrating in respect to looks, and some of

them thought him a policeman in plain clothes. This was not a comfortable notion among a number of hot-blooded men. Fairfax, however, soon became too much interested in the proceedings to observe the looks that were directed to himself. There was a good deal of commonplace business to be gone through first—small subscriptions to pay, some of which were weekly; little books to produce, with little sums marked; reports to be given in, on here and there a wavering member, a falling back into the world, a new convert. It looked to Fairfax at first like a parochial meeting about the little charities of the parish, the schools, and the alms-houses. Perhaps organisation of every kind has its inherent vulgarities. This movement felt grand, heroic, to the men engaged in it, how much above the curate and his pennies who could say; but it seemed inevitable that it should begin in the same way.

The walls were roughly plastered and washed with a dingy tone of colour. The men sat on benches which were very uncomfortable, and showed all the independent curves of backs which toil had not straightened, the rough heads and dingy clothes. Over all this the gas flickered, unmitigated even by the usual glass globe.

There was a constant shuffling of feet, a murmur of conversation, sometimes the joke of a privileged wit whispered about with earthquakes of suppressed laughter. For the men, on the whole, suppressed themselves with the sense of the dignity of a meeting and the expectation of Spears's address. "He's a fellow from the North, ain't he?" Fairfax heard one man say. "No, he's a miner fellow." "He's one of the cotton spinners." While another added authoritatively, "None of you know anything about it. It's Spears the delegate. He's been sent about all over the place. There's been some talk of sending him to Parliament." "Parliament! I put no faith in Parliament." "No more do I." "Nor I," the men said. "And yet," said the first speaker, "we've got no chance of getting our rights till they've got a lot like him there."

At this moment one of the men at the table rose, and there was instant silence. The lights flared, the rain rained outside with a persistent swish upon the pavement, the restless feet shuffled upon the floor, but otherwise there was not a sound to interrupt the stillness. This was somewhat tried, however, by the reading of a report, still very like a missionary report in a parish

meeting. There was a good deal about an S. C. and an L. M. who had been led to think of higher principles of political morality by the action of the society, and who had now finally given in their adhesion. The meeting greeted the announcement of these new members by knocking with their boot-heels upon the floor. Then some one else got up and said that the prospects of the society were most hopeful, and that the conversion of L. C. and S. M. were only an earnest of what was to come. Soon the whole mass of the working classes, as already its highest intelligence, would be with them. The meeting again applauded this "highest intelligence." They felt it in themselves, and they liked the compliment. "Mr. Spears will now address the meeting," the last speaker said, and then this confused part of the proceeding came to an end, and everything became clear again when Spears spoke.

And yet Fairfax thought, looking on, it was by no means clear what Spears wanted, or wished to persuade the others that they wanted. Very soon, however, he secured their attention which was one great point; the very feet got disciplined into quiet, and when a late member came down the long passage which led straight

into this room, there was a universal murmur and hush as he bustled in. Spears stood up and looked round him, his powerful square shoulders and rugged face dominating the assembly. He took a kind of text for his address, "not from the Bible," he said, "which many of you think out of date," at which there was a murmur, chiefly of assent; "mind you," said the orator, "I don't; that's a subject on which I'm free to keep my private opinion; but the other book you'll allow is never out of date. It's from the sayings of a man that woke up out of the easy thoughts of a lad, the taking everything for granted as we all do one time or another, to find that he could take nothing for granted, that all about was false, horrible, mean, and *sham*. That was the worst of it all—sham. He found the mother that bore him was a false woman and the girl he loved hid his enemy behind the door to listen to what he was saying, and his friends, the fellows he had played with, went off with him on a false errand, with letters to get him killed, 'There's something rotten,' says he 'in this State of Denmark—' that was all the poor fellow could get out at first, 'something rotten;' ay, ay, Prince Hamlet, a deal that was rotten. We're not fond

of princes, my friends," said Spears, stopping short with a gleam of humour in his face, "but Shakspeare lived a good few years ago, and hadn't found that out. We've made a great many discoveries since his day."

At this the feet applauded again, but there was a little doubtfulness upon the faces of the audience who did not see what the speaker meant to be at.

"'There's something rotten in the state of Denmark, that's what he said. He didn't mean Denmark any more than I mean Clerkenwell. He meant this life he was living in, where the scum floated to the top, and nothing was what it seemed. That was Hamlet's quarrel with the world, and it's my quarrel, and yours, and every thinking man's. It was a grand idea, my friends, to make a government, to have a king. Yes, wait a bit till I've finished my sentence. I tell you it was a noble idea," said the orator, raising his voice, and cowing into silence half a dozen violent contradictions, "to get hold of the best man and set him up there to help them that couldn't help themselves, to make the strong merciful and the weak brave. That was an idea! I honour the man that invented it whoever he was; but I'd lay you all a fortune if I had it, I'd wager all

I'm worth (which isn't much) that whoever the first king was, that was made after he had found out the notion, it wasn't he! And it was a failure, my lads," said Spears.

At this there was a tumult of applause. "I don't see anything to stamp about for my part," he said shaking his head. "That gives me no pleasure. It was a grand idea, but as sure as life they took the wrong man, and it was a failure. And it has always been a failure and always will be—so now there's nothing for it but to abolish kings——"

The rest of the sentence was lost in wild applause.

"But the worst is," continued the speaker, "that we've done that practically for a long time in England, and we're none the better. Instead of one bad king we've got Parliament, which is a heap of bad kings. Men that care no more for the people than I care for that fly. Men that will grind you, and tax you, and make merchandise of you, and neglect your interest and tread you down to the ground. Many is the cheat they've passed upon you. At this moment you cheer me when I say down with the kings, but you look at one another and you raise your eyebrows when I say down with the parliament. You've got the suffrage and you think that's all right.

The suffrage! what does the suffrage do for you? It's another sham, a little stronger than all the rest. They'll give more of you, and more of you the suffrage, till they let in the women (I don't say a word against that. Some of the women have more sense than you have, and the rest you can always whop them) and the babies next for anything I can tell. And it will all be rotten, rotten, rotten to the core. And then a great cry will rise out of this poor country, and it will be Hamlet again," cried the orator, pouring out the full force of his great melodious voice from his broad chest—"'Oh, cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!'"

There was a feeble stamp or two upon the floor; but the audience, though curious and impressed, were not up to the level of the speaker, and did not know what to make of him. He saw this, and he changed his tone.

"I read the other day of the kind of parliament that was a real parliament of the people. Once every two months the whole population met in a great square; and there they were asked to choose the men that were to govern them. They voted all by word of mouth —no ballot tickets in those days—for there was not one of them that was afraid to give his opinion.

They chose their men for two months, no more. They were men that were known to all the place that had been known from their cradles; no strangers there, but men they could lay their hands on if they went wrong. It was for two months only, as I tell you, and then the parliament came together again, and the men they had chosen gave an account of what they had done. In my opinion—I don't know what you may think—that was as perfect a plan of government, and as true a rule of the people as ever existed on this globe. Who is that grumbling behind there? If it is you, Paul Markham, stand up like a man and say what you've got to say."

There was a pause for a moment, and everybody looked round; but as no reply was made, the hearers drowned all attempts at opposition in a tumult of stamping feet and approving exclamations. "That was something like," they cried. And "Go on. Go on! Bravo, Spears!"

"Ah, yes. You say 'Bravo, Spears!' because I humour you. But that young fellow there at the back, I know what he meant to say. It was all rotten, rotten, rotten to the core; that peoples' parliament was the

greatest humbug that ever was seen; it was the instrument of tyrants; it was the murderer of freedom; there was nothing too silly, nothing too wicked for it; its vote was a sham, and its wisdom was a sham. Ah! you don't cry 'Bravo, Spears!' any more. The reason of all this is that we never get hold of the right men. I don't know what there is in human nature that makes it so. I have studied it a deal, but I've never found that out. The scum gets uppermost, boils up and sticks on the top. That's my experience. The less honest a man is, the more sure he is to get up to the top. I don't speak of being born equal like some folks; but I think every man has a right to his share of the place he's born in—a right to have his portion wherever he is. One man with another, our wants are about the same. One eats a little more, one drinks a little more (and we all do more of that than is good for us), than the rest. But what we've got a right to is our share of what's going. Instead of great estates, great parks, grand palaces where those who call themselves our masters live and starve us, we have a right, every man, to enough of it to live on, to enough——"

Here the speaker was interrupted by the clamour of

the cheering. The men rose up and shouted; they drowned his voice in the enthusiasm of their delight. Paul had come in behind after Spears began to speak. Though there had been in him a momentary movement of offence when he saw Fairfax, yet he had ended by remaining close to him, not seated, however, by leaning against the doorway in the sight of all. And it was likewise apparent in the sight of all that he was dressed, not like Fairfax in morning clothes, which offered a less visible contrast with the men surrounding him, but in evening dress, only partially covered by his light overcoat. He had come indeed to this assembly met to denounce all rights of the aristocrat, in the very livery of social superiority. Fairfax, who was anxious about the issue, could not understand what it meant. Paul's eyes were fixed upon Spears, and there was a half smile and air of something that might be taken for contempt on his face.

The applause went to the orator's head. He plunged into violent illustrations of his theory, by the common instances of riot, impurity, extravagance, debt, and general wickedness which were to be found in what were called the higher classes. Perhaps Spears himself was

aware that his arguments would not bear a very close examination: and the face of his disciple there before him, the face which had hitherto glowed with acquiescence, flushed with indignation, answered every appeal he made, but which was now set, pale, and impassive, without any response at all, with indeed an evident determination to withstand him—filled him with a curious passion. He could not understand it, and he could not endure to see Paul standing there, Paul, his son in the faith, his disciple of whom he was unconsciously more proud than of all the other converts he had made, with that air of contradiction and defiance. The applause excited him and this tacit opposition excited him still more. Fairfax had produced no such effect upon the demagogue; he had been but a half believer at the best, a critic more interested than convinced. He was one of those whom other men can permit to look on, from whom they can accept sympathy without concurrence, and tolerate dissent. But with Paul the case was very different. Every glance at him inflamed the mind of Spears. Was it possible (the idea flashed across his mind in full torrent of his speech) that this beloved disciple was lost to him? He would not believe it, he would not

permit it to be; and with this impulse he flung forth his burning accusations, piled up sham and scandal upon the heads of aristocrats, represented them as standing in the way of every good undertaking, of treading down the poor on every side, of riding roughshod everywhere over liberties and charities alike, robbers of their brethen, destroyers of their fellow-creatures. And as every burning period poured forth, the noise, the enthusiasm became indescribable. The men who listened were no more murderous rebels than English landlords and millionaires are sanguinary oppressors, but they shouted and stamped, and rent their throats with applause, all the more that they were well acquainted with these arguments. Hamlet and "the cursed spite" of his position were of doubtful interest; but here was something which they understood. Thus they went on together, mutually exciting each other, the speaker and the listeners—until suddenly in the midst of the hubbub a strange note, a new voice, struck in, and caught them all in full uproar.

"What's that?" cried Spears, with the quick hearing of offended affection. "You behind there—some one spoke."

The men all turned round—the entire assembly—to see what the interruption was. Then they saw, leaning carelessly against the wall, his grey overcoat open, showing the expanse of fine linen, the silk lapels of the evening coat in which Paul had chosen to array himself, the young aristocrat, looking his part to the fullest perfection, with scorn on his face, and proud indifference, careless of them and their opinions. The mere sight of him brought an impulse of fierce hostility.

"I said, that's not so," said Paul, distinctly, throwing his defiance over all their heads at his old instructor. Spears was almost beside himself with pain and passion.

"Do you give me the lie," he said, "to my face—you, Paul? Oh, you shall have your title—that's the meaning of the change! you, Sir Paul Markham, baronet,—Do you give me the lie?"

"If you like to take it so, Spears. You know as well as I do that men are not monsters like that in one rank and heroes in another. Title or no title, that's the truth, and you know it—whatever those men that take in everything you are saying may think. You know that's not so."

The excited listeners saw Spears grow pale and wince. Then he shouted out with an excited voice—

"And that's a lie whoever said it. I! say one thing and mean another! The time has been when a man that said that to me would have rued it. He would have rued it——"

"And he shall rue it!" said a voice in the crowd. The people turned round with a common impulse. Fairfax, when he saw what was coming, had risen too, and thrown himself in front of Paul. He was not so tall a man, and Paul's dark hair towered over his light locks. He tried to push him out into the narrow-flagged passage, and called to him to go—to go! But Paul's blood was up; he stood and faced them all, holding his arm before him in defence against the raised fists and threatening looks. "I'm one against a hundred," he said, perfectly calm. "You can do what you please. I will not give in, whatever you do. I tell you what Spears says is not true."

And then the uproar got up again and raged round them. There was a hesitation about striking the first blow. Nobody liked to begin the onslaught upon one single man, or a man with but one supporter. Fairfax

got his arm into his, and did his best to push and drag him away into the paved passage. But it was not till Spears himself, breaking through the angry crowd, gave him a thrust with his powerful arm that he yielded. What might have happened even then, Fairfax did not know; for the passage was narrow, and the two or three people hanging about the door sufficed to make another angry crowd in their way. While, however, he was pushing his way along by the wall, doing all he could to impel before him Paul's reluctant figure, a door suddenly opened behind them, a light flashed out, and some one called to them to come in. Paul stumbled backwards, fortunately, over the step, and was thus got at a disadvantage; and in two minutes more Fairfax had struggled in, bringing his companion with him. The place into which they were admitted was a narrow passage, quite dark—and the contrast from the noise and crowd without to this silence bewildered the young men. Even then, however, the voice of Spears reached them over the murmur of the crowd.

"There's a specimen for you!" cried the orator, with a harsh laugh. "The scum come uppermost! What did I tell you? that, take what pains you like, you

never get the right man. I loved that lad like my son; and all I said was gospel to him. But he has come into his title, he has come into the land he swore he never would take from the people, and there's the end. Would you like a better proof of what I said? Oh, rotten, rotten, rotten to the core!"

CHAPTER V.

THEY were in a small, dingy room, lighted with one feeble candle—still within hearing of the tumult close by. Paul had twisted his foot in the stumble, which was the only thing that had saved him from a scuffle and possible fight. He was paler than before with the pain. He had put his foot up upon a chair at Fairfax's entreaty, who feared a sprain; but himself, in his excitement, did not seem to feel it.

"My title and my lands!" he said, with a laugh which was more bitter than that of Spears. "You heard him, Fairfax. I've come into my property; that is what has caused this change in my opinions."

"Never mind, the man's a fool," said Fairfax angrily.

"He is not a fool," said Paul, "but it shows how

well you can judge a man when you do not know his circumstances."

Fairfax, however, it must be owned, was as much puzzled as Spears. What was it that had caused the change? It was not much more than a month since Paul's devotion to Spears and his scheme had kept him from his father's death-bed. He had been intent then on giving up his whole life to the creed which this evening he had publicly contradicted in the face of its excited supporters. Fairfax could not make out what it meant any more than the deserted demagogue could. If Paul, indeed, had reached the high top-gallant of his fortunes—if he had held the control of a large property in his hands—a position like that of a prince—there might have been reason in such a change of faith. Though it gave a certain foundation for Spears's bitter sneer, yet there was reason in it. A young man might very well be justified in abandoning the society of revolutionaries, when he himself entered the ranks of those who are responsible for the safety of the country and have a great deal to lose. But he did not understand Paul's position now, and a change so singular bewildered him. It was not, however, either necessary

or expedient to enter into that question; and he addressed himself with more satisfaction to rubbing the injured ankle. He had asked the woman who admitted them, and who was in great terror of "the meeting," to get a cab, but had been answered that she dared not leave the house, and that they must not think of leaving the house till all was over in the "Hall." It was not a cheerful prospect. To his surprise, however, Paul showed less impatience than he did. He was full of the place and the discussion they had just left.

"He is no fool," Paul said, "that is the most wonderful of all. A man may go on telling a pack of lies for years, and yet be as true in himself as all the rest is false. I understand your looks, Fairfax. You think I have gone as far as most men."

"Keep your foot still, my good fellow," was all Fairfax said.

"That is all very well; you want an explanation of my conduct," said Paul. "You want to know what this inconsistency means; for it is inconsistency. Well, then, there's just this, that I don't mean to tell. I am as free as another man to form my own opinions, I hope."

"Hark! they're cheering again," said Fairfax.

"What fellows they are to cheer! He has got them into a good humour. They looked savage enough half an hour ago. It's a little absurd, isn't it, that you and I, Paul, who have been considered very advanced in our political opinions, should be in a kind of hiding here?"

"Hiding! I will go back at once and make my profession of faith," cried Paul; but when he sprang up to carry out his intention, the pain of his foot overpowered him. "Have I sprained it, do you think?—that is an affair of four or five weeks," he said, with a look of dismay.

After this very little passed. They sat on each side of the little deal table with the coarse candle sputtering between them, and listened to the hoarse sounds of the voices, the tumultuous applause on the other side of the wall. This was still going on, though in subdued tones, when the door suddenly opened. It was not easy at first to see who had come in, till Spears's face appeared over the flickering light. It was angry and dark, and overclouded with something like shame.

"I am glad you are here still, you two," he said in subdued tones.

Neither of the young men spoke. At last Fairfax, who was not the one on whom his eyes were bent, said—

"We were waiting till the meeting was over. Till then, it appears, we can't have a cab sent for. Markham has hurt his foot."

"Good Lord! How did he do that?" Spears came round and looked at it where it lay supported on the chair. He looked as if he would have liked to stroke and pet the injured limb like a child. "I hope it was none of those fellows with their pushing and stupid folly," he said.

"It was not done by any refinement of politeness, certainly."

These were the first words Paul had said, and they were uttered with the same half mocking smile.

"They're rough fellows, that's the truth," said Spears; "and they have an idiot for a guide," he went on in a low voice. "Look here, Paul, you aggravated me with those grand looks of yours, and that sneer. You know as well as I do what puts me out. When it's a fellow I care for, I can't stand it. All the asses in Rotten Row might come and haw-haw at me, and I

shouldn't mind; but you! that are a kind of child of my soul, Paul!"

"I hope your other children will get more mercy from you, then," said Paul, without looking at him. "You have not had much for me, Spears."

"I, lad? What have I ever done but cherish you as if you were my own! I have been as proud of you—! All your fine ways that I've jibed about have been a pleasure to me all the time. It went to my heart to think that you, the finest aristocrat of all the lot, were following old Spears for love of a principle. I said to myself, abuse them as we like, there's stuff in these old races—there's something in that blue blood. I don't deny it before you two, that may laugh at me as you please. I that have just been telling all those lads that it's the scum that comes uppermost (and believe it too). I that have sworn an eternal war against the principle of unequal rank and accumulation of property—"

Spears paused. There was nothing ludicrous to him in the idea of this eternal war, waged by a nameless stump orator against all the kingdoms of the world and the power of them. He was too much in earnest to be conscious of any absurdity. He was as serious in his

crusade as if he had been a conqueror with life and death in his hands, and his voice trembled with the reality of this confession which he was going to make.

"Well!" he said, "I, of whom you know all this as well as I do myself, I've been proud of your birth and your breeding, Paul, because it was all the grander of you to forget them for the cause. I've dwelt on these things in my mind. I've said, there's the flower of them all, and he's following after me! Look here! you're not going to take it so dreadfully amiss if, after not hearing a word from you, after not knowing what you were going to do, seeing you suddenly opposite to me with your most aggravating look (and you can put on an aggravating look when you like, you know you can, and drive me wild," Spears said with a deprecating, tender smile, putting his hand, caressingly, on the back of Paul's chair)—"if I let out a bitter word, a lash of ill-temper against my will, you are not going to make that a quarrel between you and me."

The man's large mobile features were working, his eyes shining out under their heavy brows. The generous soul in him was moved to its depth. He had, being "wild," as he said, with sudden passion, accused

Paul of having yielded to the seductions of his new rank—but in his heart he did not believe the accusation he had made. He trusted his young disciple with all the doting confidence of a woman. Of a woman! his daughter Janet, though she was a woman, and a young one, had no such enthusiasm of trust in her being. She would have scorned his weakness had she been by —very differently would Janet have dealt with a hesitating lover. But the demagogue had enthroned in his soul an ideal to which, perhaps, his very tenderest affections, the deepest sentiments he was capable of, had clung. He had fallen for the moment into that madness which works in the brain when we are wroth with those we love. And he did not know now how to make sufficient amends for it, how to open wide enough that window into his heart which showed the quivering and longing within. But he had said for the moment all he could say.

And for a time there was silence in the little room. Fairfax, who understood him, turned away, and began to stare at a rude-coloured print on the wall in order to leave the others alone. He would himself have held out his hand before half this self-revelation had been

made, and perhaps Spears would have but lightly appreciated that naïve response. But Paul was by no means ready to yield. He kept silence for what seemed to the interested spectator ten minutes at least. Then he said, slowly—

"I think it would be wise to inquire into the facts of the case before permitting yourself to use such language, Spears—even if you had not roused your rabble against me."

He said these strident words in the most forcible way, making the r's roll.

"Rabble?" Spears repeated, with a tone of dismay; but his patience was not exhausted, nor his penitence. "I know," he said, "it was wrong. I don't excuse myself. I behaved like a fool, and it costs a man like me something to say that. Paul—come! why should we quarrel? Let bygones be bygones. They should have torn me to pieces before they had laid a finger on you."

"A good many of them would have smarted for it if they had laid a finger on me," said Paul. "That I promise you."

Spears laughed; his mind was relieved. He gave his vigorous person a shake and was himself again.

"Well, that is all over," he said. "It will be a lesson to me. I am a confounded fool at bottom after all. Whatever mental advantages you may have, that's what the best of us have to come to. My blood gets hot, and I lose my head. There's a few extenuating circumstances though. Have you forgotten, Paul, that we were to sail in October, and it's the 20th of September now? Not a word have I heard from you since you left Oxford, three weeks ago. What was I to think? I know what's happened in the meantime; and I don't say," said Spears, slowly, "that if you were to throw us overboard at the last moment, it would be a thing without justification. I told you at the time you would be more wise to let us alone. But you never had an old head on young shoulders. A generous heart never counts the cost in that way; still—— And the time, my dear fellow, is drawing very near."

"I may as well tell you," said Paul, tersely, "I am not going with you, Spears."

The man sat firm in his chair as if he had received a blow, leaning back a little, pressing himself against the woodwork.

"Well!" he said, and kept upon his face a curious

smile—the smile, and the effort alike, showing how deeply the stroke had penetrated. "Well!" he repeated, "now that I know everything—now you have told me—I don't know that I have a word to say."

Paul said nothing, and for another minute there was again perfect silence. Then Spears resumed—

"I thought as much," he said. "I have always thought it since the day you went away. A man understands that sort of thing by instinct. Well! it's a disappointment, I don't deny; but no doubt," said Spears, with a suppressed tone of satire in his voice, "though I've no experience of the duties of a rich baronet, nor the things it lays upon you, no doubt there's plenty to do in that avocation; and looking after property requires work. There's a thousand things that it must now seem more necessary to do than to start away across the Atlantic with a set of visionaries. I told you so at the beginning, Paul—or Sir Paul, I suppose I ought to say; but titles are not much in my way," he added, with a smile, "as you know."

"You may save yourself the trouble of titles here, for I am not Sir Paul, nor have I anything in the way

of property to look after that will give me much trouble. It appears—" said Paul, with a smile that was very like that of Spears, which sat on his lips like a grimace, "it appears that I have an elder brother who is kind enough to relieve me from all inconvenience of that sort."

Spears turned to Fairfax with a look of consternation, as if appealing to him to guarantee the sanity of his friend.

"What does he mean?" he cried, bewildered.

"We need not go into all the question," said Paul. "Fairfax, haven't they got that cab yet? My foot's better—I can walk to the door, and these gentlemen seem to be dispersing. We need not enter into explanations. I'm not a rich baronet, that is about all. The scum has not come uppermost this time. You see you made a mistake in your estimate of my motives."

This time he laughed that harsh, bitter, metallic laugh which is one of the signs of nervous passion. He had such a superiority over his assailant as nothing else could have given him. And as for Spears, shame, and wonder, and distress, struck him dumb. He gasped for breath.

"My God!" he said; "and I to fall upon you for what had never happened, and taunt you with wealth when you were poor. Poor! are you actually poor, Paul?"

"What is the use of searching into it? the facts are as I have told you. I shan't starve," said the young man, holding his head high.

Spears looked at him with a mixture of grief and satisfaction, and held out a large hand.

"Never mind," he said, his face melting and working, and a smile of a very different character gleaming over it, "you would have been out of place with us if you had been Sir Paul; but come now, my lad, come now! It's not money we want, but men. Come with us, you'll be as welcome as the sunshine, though you have not a penny. For a rich man, I could see myself the incongruity; but for a poor man, what could be better than a new country and a fair field. Come! don't bear malice for a few hasty words that were repented of as soon as they were said. I would have scorned to pay a word had you been kept back by your new grandeur. But now that you're disinherited—why, Paul, come—Australia is the place for such as you.

Young and strong, with a good heart, and all the world before you! Why, there's a new country for you to get hold of, to govern, if you like. Come! I'll not oppose any dignity you may gain out there; and I tell you, you'll have the ball at your foot, and the whole world before you! Come with us, I ask this time as a favour, Paul."

He had held out his hand with some wavering and doubt, though with enthusiasm. But gradually a curious expression of wonder came to his face; his hand dropped at his side. Paul made no motion towards taking it; the demagogue thought it was resentment. A flush of vivid colour came over him. "Come, this is a little too much for old friends," he said, getting up hastily from his chair, with a thrill of wounded feeling in his voice.

"Don't wrong him, Spears," said Fairfax. "He has had a great deal to bother him, and his foot is bad. You can meet another time and settle that. At present, let us get him out of this place. If he is angry, he has a right to be; but never mind that now. Let us get him out of here."

Spears did not say another word. He stalked away

into the house to which this room belonged, and the "hall" beyond it. It was a little tavern of the lower class in which he was living. By and by the woman came to say there was a cab at the door. And Paul limped out, leaning on Fairfax.

All was quiet outside, the meeting dispersed; only one or two men sitting in the room down stairs, who cast a curious look upon the two young men, but took no further notice. As for Spears, he did not appear at all. He was lurking behind, his heart wrung with various feelings, but too much wounded, too much disappointed, too sore and sad to show himself. If Paul had seemed to require help, the rejected prophet was lingering in the hope of offering it; but nothing of the kind seemed the case. He limped out holding Fairfax's arm. He did not even look round him as the other did, or show any signs of a wish to see his former friend. Spears had not got through the world up to this time without mortification; but he had never suffered so acutely as now.

"Poor Spears," Fairfax contrived to say, as they jolted along, leaving the mean and monotonous streets behind them. "I think you might have taken his hand."

"Pshaw!" said Paul, "I am tired to death of all that. I don't mean to say he is not honest—far more honest than most of them—but what is the meaning of all that clap-trap? Why, Spears ought to know as well as any man what folly it is. Bosh!" said the young man with an expression of disgust. The milder spectator beside him looked at him with unfeigned surprise.

"I thought you went as far as he did, Markham. I thought you were out and out in your principles, accepting no compromise: I thought——"

"You thought I was a fool," said Paul, bitterly, "and you were right enough, if that is any satisfaction to you; but I had a lesson or two before my poor father's death—and more since. Don't let us speak of it. When a man has made an ass of himself, it is no pleasure to him to dwell upon it. And I am not free yet, and I don't know when I shall be," he cried, with an irrepressible desire for sympathy, then closed his mouth as if he had shut a book, and said no more.

Thus they went jolting and creaking over the wet pavements all gleaming with muddy reflections. London was grim and dismal under that autumn rain, no flashing

of carriages about, or gleams of toilette, or signs of the great world which does its work under the guise of pleasure; only a theatre now and then in the glare of gas with idle people hanging about, keeping themselves dry under the porch; and afterward the great vacant rooms at the clubs with a vague figure scattered here and there, belated "men," or waiters at their ease; the foot-passengers hurrying along under umbrellas, the cabs all splashed with mud, weary wayfarers and muddy streets. There was scarcely a word exchanged between them as they went along.

"Where are you living?" said Fairfax at last.

"The house is shut up," said Paul, giving the name of his hotel.

"But my place is not. Will you come with me and have your foot looked to? I wish you would come, Markham. There are heaps of things I want to say to you, and to ask you——"

Paul was in so fantastic and unreasonable a condition of mind that these last words were all that was necessary to alter his decision. He had thought he would go—why not?—and escape a little from all the contradictions in his own mind by means of his friend's

company. But the thought of having to answer questions made an end of that impulse of confidence. He had himself taken to the hotel instead, where, he said to himself with forlorn pride, at least there was nobody to insist upon any account of his thoughts or doings, where he should be unmolested by reason of being alone.

CHAPTER VI.

THE visit of Janet Spears had made a great impression upon Lady Markham. She abstained as long as she could from speaking of it to Alice, but what is there which a woman can keep from her closest companion, her daughter, who is as her own soul? Up to this moment Alice had known nothing whatever about Janet Spears, not even of her existence. Perhaps Lady Markham's discretion, and the painful sense that she had interfered injudiciously in Paul's affairs, might not have sufficed to keep her secret; but Sir William's illness had carried the day over everything, and not a word had been said between the mother and daughter on this subject. Even now Lady Markham made a heroic effort. Full as was her mind of the visit, she kept it to herself for two long days, thinking over

everything that had been said, and wondering if she had done as she ought, or if she should have been more kind to the girl whom (was it possible?) Paul loved, or more severe upon the creature who had enthralled him. At one time she thought of Janet in one way, at another in the other. The girl he loved (was it possible?), or the woman who had put forth evil arts and got him in her power. It is hard for a woman to be quite just to any one, male or female, who has injured her son: and people say it is hardest to be just, to a woman who has done so. [In this point I do not feel qualified to judge; but men say so who know women better, naturally, than they know themselves.] Lady Markham struggled very hard to be just: but it was difficult; and in a moment of pressure, when Alice came upon her suddenly, and with a soft arm round her and a soft cheek laid against hers, entreated to know if there was any fresh trouble—how could she help but tell her everything? Alice justified all vulgar sentiment on the subject by being triumphantly unjust.

"He must have been cheated into it," she cried. "Paul—*Paul!* so fastidious as he is, how could he ever, ever, have thought of a girl like that?"

But Lady Markham, anxious to keep the balance even, shook her head.

"My dearest, you don't know much about men. I can't tell why it is. They choose those whom you would think they would fly from, and fly from those whom you would think—I don't know, Alice, perhaps they get tired of the kind of women like you and me, whom they see every day."

"Mamma!"

"I have thought so often, dear. *We* don't feel so, but men—they get tired of one kind of woman. They think they will try something different. It has always been a mystery. And you must not think this was a—was not a good girl. I saw nothing wrong about her. Perhaps a little more——no, I don't know what to say. She was not saucy, or bold, or—— Perhaps it was only that she was not a lady," Lady Markham said with a sigh.

"But that Paul should care for any one who was not a lady," Alice said, clasping her hands together with mingled despair and impatience; and then she cried suddenly, "Poor little Dolly!"

"Dolly!" said Lady Markham. Nothing could

exceed her surprise. The air of grieved doubt and hesitation which had been in her face while they discussed Janet gave way to lively astonishment and displeasure. "What do you mean by Dolly?" she said.

Then Alice faltered forth an ashamed confession—that she thought—that she had supposed—that she did not know anything about it—did not believe there was anything in it—but only, Dolly——

Nothing was to be made of this hesitating speech.

"Dolly," said Lady Markham, drawing herself up, "is a dear little girl. I am very fond of her. In her proper place she is charming; but my dear Alice, Dolly is scarcely more suitable for Paul, in his position. Ah!——"

Lady Markham stopped short and hid her face in her hands.

During the time that these conversations—the visit of Janet and all its attendant circumstances, and the explanation of it thus given to Alice—were going on, these ladies lived upon the post which brought frequent communications from the people in London who were carrying on such inquiries as could be made about the

intruder into the family, he who had so suddenly and decisively blighted all the prospects of Paul. Colonel Fleetwood wrote, and Mr. Scrivener, and Paul himself, though less frequently. The former was the only one that was hopeful; he was perfectly ready to believe that Gus was an impostor, and the whole thing "a got up affair." Was it likely, he argued, that Sir William, the most steady-going old fellow, could be guilty of such a tremendous mistake? Had it only been a wickedness! but it was such a folly, such an error in judgment. A statesman, a man in parliament, one of the rulers of the country, how could any one suppose him capable of a thing so foolish? Mr. Scrivener was far less confident. He knew what a lawyer's law was in his own private affairs, and he had not much more confidence in a stateman's wisdom. He had not sent any one to Barbadoes, but he was making careful inquiries among all sorts of people who knew—West Indian agents, ancient governors, and consuls. And he had heard of Gus from more than one of these referees, and found his story confirmed in all points as to his life in Barbadoes. About his connexion with Sir William Markham, these people did not know, but they gave him the

highest character, and confirmed his statement in many important details. The lawyer did not conceal from Lady Markham his complete conviction. Neither did Paul, who had given up his own cause at once, though he dragged on in London, dancing attendance at the lawyer's office and hearing from day to day some fresh and, as he thought, unmeaning piece of additional proof. "Of course it is all right," Paul wrote; "I never for a moment doubted that the man was all right. He may be a cad, but he was speaking the truth. I stay here to humour them; but I know very well that they will discover nothing which will shake his credit; and the best thing I can do is to get myself as soon as I can out of Sir Gus's way." This way of speaking of it was to both the ladies like turning the sword round in the wound. Where was it he meant to take himself, out of the way? They had neither of them any clue to Paul's changed sentiments, and if he had vowed to go away while all was well with him, when he had fortune and splendour within reach, with those socialist emigrants whose very name was enough to alarm them, what would he do now when this horrible downfall and disappointment had loosed the bonds between him and his

native country? A wild desire to call for help, even upon the least desirable of auxiliaries, upon Janet Spears herself, came to Lady Markham's mind. If the girl could keep him at home, she felt herself able to receive even Janet to her heart.

While their mother's mind was thus occupied, the two little girls had languidly resumed their lessons. It is no reproach to the children to say that it was not very long before the impression made by their father's death would have died out naturally, in an occasional tender recollection, or sudden burst of crying when something recalled him to their memory. It was not grief that made them languid, but the sense of something going on, a living agitation, and the shadow of a still greater disturbance to come. It was whispered vaguely between them that no doubt they would have to leave Markham, a thing which they sometimes felt like a deathblow and sometimes like a deliverance. When Bell and Marie thought of leaving their woods, their gardens, their "own house," in which they had been born, the desolation of the thought overwhelmed them; but when, on the other hand, they thought of going away, perhaps to London, perhaps "abroad," a

thrill of guilty rapture ran through their bosoms. They had never come to such a pitch of wickedness as to say this to each other, but already in the rapid communion of the eyes each had guessed that the other thought there might be something to be said for such a possibility; and the idea made them restless, unable to settle to their work, and very trying to Mademoiselle, who, poor lady, had to put up with this reverberation of the troubles of the house without really having any share in them, or taking any very lively interest in these family concerns. Sometimes she had a headache, caused, as she said, by nothing but the continued disturbance of her nerves through their endless rustlings and changes. And when this headache got very bad and Mademoiselle betook herself to bed, it cannot be said that her pupils were sorry. They put their books away (having been brought up in the strictest habits of tidiness), and hastened out to their favourite haunts. The air and the movement stilled their nerves, which were as much at fault as those of Mademoiselle. They were seated on, or rather in, a tree near the fishpond, the favourite centre of all their games when the next great event occurred to them. Bell had brought out a book with

her, which she held embraced in her arms, but had not opened. She was seated well up in the tree, dangling her feet close to Marie's head, who was seated on a lower branch. Marie had no book—her tastes were not literary; and she was very near the edge of that great discovery which both had made, but neither avowed, that under some circumstances it might be "nice" to go away.

"Were you ever in a great big, big place—in a city, Bell?"

"You little silly, of course I have been in Farboro'. I have been with mamma a hundred times, and so have you."

"Farboro' is not what I mean. Farboro' is only a town. There are not so very many people in it, and the cathedral is the chief place. It is not noisy or wicked at all. I mean a great horrid place where there are crowds everywhere, and policemen, and where nobody goes to church. That is what they call a city in books. London is a city," said Marie.

"I have never been in London, you know. I wonder if we shall ever see it," said Bell. "I wonder if mamma will ever take us there. I wonder if you and I

will be quite different from Alice when we grow up. *She* has been presented. I wonder if it makes a difference when poor girls are like us—without any father," she added, with a little choke of tears.

"Do you think we shall be poor?" said Marie. "There is not much difference now. We have all the same servants, and as much to eat, and Mademoiselle just the same."

"It will not make any difference in what we have to eat," said Bell, approaching the dangerous subject. "But—perhaps we may not be able to stay at Markham. Oh, Marie! what would you think if mamma were to give up Markham altogether and go away?"

Marie looked up with large eyes, stretching her neck, as her sister was at an elevation almost perpendicular. She said, in a tone of awe, "Oh, I don't know! What would *you* think, Bell?"

Neither of the children liked to commit themselves. At length Bell, who felt that her superior age required of her that she should lead the way, assumed the privilege of her years. "I don't know either," she said, reflectively. "If it was in summer, when everything is bright, I should not like it at all; but if, perhaps," she

added, slower and slower, "it was in the rainy weather —when you can't go out, when the grass is so wet you sink in it, when there is nothing but sleet and slush, and the trees drop cold drops upon you even when it's not raining, and you get your frock all wet even in the avenue——"

Marie's eyes opened bigger and bigger after every step of this hypothesis. She followed them with a movement of her lips and a gasp of excitement at the end.

"Then—" said Bell, "perhaps—I think—it might be rather nice, Marie."

"Oh, Bell! that is what I sometimes thought—but I never liked to say it."

"Nor me," said Bell, more courageous, indifferent to grammar—and going on with hardihood after she had made the first plunge. "There would be Madame Tussaud's, and the Crystal Palace, and the British Museum, and Westminster Abbey, and all the bazaars. However bad the weather was, there would always be something. I dare say mamma would take us to the theatre."

"But not just now," said Marie. "It would not be

nice to go just now. It would look as if we had forgotten——"

"Did I say *now?* At present it is only autumn, and everybody is in the country. But when the days get short and dark, and you have to light the candles directly—What is it?" cried Bell, for Marie had shaken herself off her branch, and, with a cry of dismay, stood looking apparently at something which was coming. "Is it Mademoiselle?" said the little girl under her breath.

Mademoiselle had a particular objection to that nest in the tree. Bell's seat was one which was usually occupied by a boy, not one of the girls' places, as Roland, and Harry contemptuously called the lower branches. It required some ingenuity to clamber into it, and more to get down again—and not only ingenuity, but an absence of petticoats would have been desirable. Bell felt herself catching here and there as she tried to get down hastily. Then came the sound of a long rent, which sent her brain all whirling. Her new black frock! and what would nurse say? The idea of nurse and Mademoiselle both waiting, full of fury, for her descent, was enough to obscure the perceptions of any

child. Her foot slipped from a mossy and treacherous twig; she caught wildly at something, she did not know what, and with a sudden whirr and whirl and blackness lost herself altogether for a moment. When she became aware of what was going on again, she found herself seated at the foot of the tree, staring across the fish-pond, with a lump on her forehead and a singing in her ears. Marie was crying, bending over her, and saying, "Oh! what can we do—what shall I do? Do you think she will die, Mr. Gus?"

"Oh, what a little goose you are!" murmured Bell, gradually coming to herself. "What should I die for? I have only got a knock—on my head." She felt the lump on her forehead wonderingly as she spoke, for it hurt her, and nature directed her hand to the spot. "I have got a *dreadful* knock on my head," she added, not without satisfaction. Then Bell leaned back on something, she did not know what, and saw a hand come round from behind with a wet handkerchief to lay upon her forehead. The hand was a brown hand with a big ring on it, at which Bell vaguely wondered where she had seen it before. Then, all of a sudden, she jumped up, upon her feet, though she felt very queer and giddy.

"It is that little gentleman! You have been talking to him, Marie!"

"And won't you talk to me, too?" said Gus, following her with his wet handkerchief. "Well, never mind, put on this. The water is out of your own fish-pond; it cannot do you any harm."

Bell was not able to resist, and he made her sit down again and have her forehead bathed. By degrees as she became aware of everything around her, Bell perceived that the little gentleman was very kind. His thin, brown hand touched her so gently, and he was not angry, though she had been angry. By and by she said, "I am better. Please, oh, please go away, Mr. Gus. I don't want to be disagreeable, but how can *I* have anything to say to you, when you have been so——"

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Gus. "What have I been?" For Bell paused, not knowing what to say.

The little girl did not continue. She contented herself with throwing down Mr. Gus's wet handkerchief from her forehead, which was not so bad now. "You are our enemy," she said.

"I am nobody's enemy. I am your brother. I want

native country? A wild desire to call for help upon the least desirable of auxiliaries, upon Spears herself, came to Lady Markham's mind. girl could keep him at home, she felt herself a receive even Janet to her heart.

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to do everything I can for you, if you will let me. Don't you remember what friends we made, and how fond we were of each other before you knew who I was; and why should you hate me now you know I am your brother?" said Gus.

It was wonderful to see him standing there, so like their father: and it was very hard for two little girls to keep up an argument with a grown-up gentleman. But Bell, who had a great spirit, was not disposed to throw down her arms. She said, "Paul is my brother, and you are his enemy," feeling at last that she was on steady ground.

"I am no more Paul's enemy than I am yours. Now listen, little girls. If some one were to leave you something, Bell—if it was to be put in the will that this was for Sir William Markham's second daughter—how should you feel if it were taken from you and given to Marie?"

"I would not put up with it all," said Bell promptly. Then perceiving how she had committed herself, "It is not the same. It was Paul's, and you want to take it from Paul."

"But I am the heir, and not Paul," said the little

gentleman. "I am the eldest. You are very fond of your little sister, but you would not give up what was yours to Marie."

This time Bell was more wise. "You don't know anything about it. What would it matter? for when anything is given to me, I always give half to Marie," she said, with sparkling eyes.

The little gentleman owned himself discomfited. "There you have the better of me," he said. "But I should like to give a great part to Paul. I would give him everything in reason. And I have come now to see you, to ask you to do me a very great favour."

They looked at him with eyes that grew bigger and bigger, and as Bell was very pale, with a lump on her forehead, her aspect with her heroic gaze was tragi-comical, to say the least. They were both greatly melted and softened by the idea of having a favour asked of them, and Marie, who was entirely gained over, did nothing but nudge and pull her sister's dress by way of recommending her to be merciful. Bell leant back upon the tree like a little image of Justice, with the bandage momentarily pushed off, but very much needed. It lay at her feet in the shape of Mr. Gus's white

handkerchief; but all the severity, yet candour, of an entire Bench was in her eyes.

"I want you to make my peace with your mother. I want you to persuade her to stay at Markham; to let me stay here to; to let me live among you like your brother, which I am. If you all run away as soon as I come near the place, what good will it do me?" said Gus. "I want you all. When the boys come home, we should have all kinds of fun, and as for you, I should not let anyone bother you. Fancy, I have nobody belonging to me but you. You are my family. I am more like an old uncle than your brother, but I should be very fond of you all the same. If your mother would only listen to me, it would be very nice for us all. I am sure you can be generous, Bell. You are old enough to understand. And I think Alice would be on my side if she would hear what I have got to say."

"Alice would never be on your side," said Bell with decision. "Paul is Alice's brother—her particular brother—and how could she bear to see him put out? Don't you know we are all in pairs at Markham? Harry is my brother, and Roland is Marie's."

"Ye-es," said Marie tired of being left out, "but he

is not always nice. He sends me away because I am a girl, as if it was my fault!"

"Well then," said Mr. Gus, "if Alice will not stand my friend, I must trust it all to you. The thing you must do is to go to your mamma, and tell her your old brother is outside, very sorry to be the cause of any trouble, but that he can't help being your brother, and a great deal older than Paul. How could I help that? I did not choose who my father was to be; and tell her if she would only speak to me, I will explain it all to her. And there is nothing she can ask me to do that I will not do for Paul. And tell her—but I need not tell you, Bell, for I can see in your eyes that you know quite well what to say."

The conviction that she would indeed be a valuable and eloquent advocate got into Bell's mind as he went on. Yes, she felt she could say all that to mamma and better than Mr. Gus had said it. She would use such arguments that Lady Markham would be sure to yield. Bell was aware that she was clever, and all her own opposition melted away in the delightful mental excitement of this immense undertaking. She forgot the lump on her forehead, the buzzing in her ears, and even

more, she forgot the family opposition to the interloper who was taking away Paul's birthright. "Oh yes, I know very well what to say," she cried with a change of sentiment which was as complete as it was rapid, and in her excitement she set off at once for the house, framing little speeches as she went, in which the case of Gus should be put forth with all the devices of forensic talent. Oh what a pity I am not a boy! was the thought which flew through her mind as on the sudden gale of inspiration which swept through her. For the moment, perhaps, this fact, which would for ever prevent her from being a special pleader by profession, was a decided advantage to Bell. Little Marie did not like to be left behind. She looked wistfully after her sister, then she said, "I will tell mamma too," and rushed after Bell. Finally, Mr. Gus himself completed the procession walking behind them. He had chosen no unfit ambassadors of peace, though the elder emissary looked very much as if she had been in the wars. And the little man walked after them with a little tremor varying the calm of self-satisfaction which usually reigned in his bosom. He knew he was doing what was by far the best and most Christian thing to do, and he

felt that he had managed it very cleverly in putting his cause into such hands. But notwithstanding these consolatory reflections, and notwithstanding the natural calm of his bosom, it is certain that Mr. Gus felt in that bosom an unaccustomed quiver of timidity which might almost have been called fear.

CHAPTER VII.

Gus came into the hall with Bell and Marie, and waited there while they proceeded to plead his cause within. He walked about the hall softly, and looked at the pictures, the old map of the county, and other curiosities that were there. These things beguiled his anxiety about his reception, and filled him with an altogether novel interest. A thing which is quite indifferent to us while it belongs to our neighbour, gains immediate attraction when it becomes our own. He looked at everything with interest, even the cases of stuffed birds that decorated one corner. Then he came and seated himself in the great bamboo chair in which he had sat down the first time he came to Markham. It was not very long ago, not yet two months, but what a difference there was! Then, indeed, he had been

anxious about his reception, and he was anxious about his reception now. But when he came first, he had been doubtful of his position altogether, not sure what his rights were, or what claim he could make—and now his anxieties were merely sentimental, and his rights all established. He sat where he had sat then, and saw everything standing just as he had seen it, the trees the same, except in colour, nothing altered except himself. Now it was all his, this noble domain. He had not known what welcome he might receive, whether his father would acknowledge him, or what would happen, and now his father's possessions were his, and no one could infringe his rights. How strange it was! He sat sunk in the great bamboo chair, and listened to the faint sound of voices which he heard through the open door, the two little girls pleading his cause. He was very desirous that they should be successful, for if he was not successful, Markham would be a dull house—but still, successful or not, nothing any longer could affect him vitally. A poor stranger, a wanderer from the tropics, unused to England and English ways, with not much money, and a very doubtful prospect before him, he had been when he first came here. How could

he help smiling at the change? He had no desire to do any one harm. All the evil that he had done was involuntary, but it could not be expected that he would give up his rights. He felt very much at his ease as he seated himself in that chair, notwithstanding the touch of anxiety in his mind. The prospect which was before him was enough to satisfy an ambitious man, but Gus was not ambitious. Indeed, the advantages he had gained were contracted in his eyes by his own inability fully to understand their extent. They were greater than he was aware, greater than his imagination could grasp. But, at least, they included everything that his imagination was able to grasp, and mortal man cannot desire more.

Bell had gone in very quietly, inspired by her mission, without pausing to think, and Marie had followed, as Marie always did. They went straight into the room where they were sure, they thought, of seeing their mother. It was in the recess, the west chamber, at the and of the drawing room, that they found her. But the circumstances did not seem very favourable to their plea. Lady Markham and Alice were reading a letter together, and Alice, it was very apparent, was crying

over her mother's shoulder, while Lady Markham was very pale, and her eyes red as if she had shed tears. "It is all over then," she was saying as the children came in, folding the letter up to put it away. And Alice cried, and made no reply. This checked the straightforward fervour of Bell, who had walked straight into the room and halfway up its length before she discovered the state of affairs. "Mamma," she had begun, "I have come from——" Then Bell paused, and cried, "Oh, mamma, dear, what is the matter?" with sudden alarm, stopping short in mid-career.

"Nothing very much," said Lady Markham, "nothing that we did not know before. What is it, Bell? You may tell me all the same. We must face it, you know. We must not allow ourselves to be overcome by it," she said with a little quiver of her lip, and a smile which made the little girls inclined to cry too.

"Oh mamma! I just came from—him," Bell stopped short again, feeling as if involved in a sort of treason, and her pale little countenance flushed. Only then Lady Markham perceived the state in which the child was.

"What have you been doing to yourself, Bell? You

have hurt yourself. You have got a blow on the forehead. What was it? Let me look at you. You have been up in one of those trees."

"Oh mamma," cried Bell, finding in this the very opportunity she wanted, "I fell, and I think I might have killed myself: but all at once, I don't know where he came from, I never saw him coming, there was the—little gentleman! He picked me up, and he spoiled all his handkerchief bathing my forehead. He was very kind, he always was very kind—to us children," said Bell.

"Oh Bell! how can you speak of that odious little man? how can you bother mamma about him? We have heard a great deal too much about him already," cried Alice with an indignation that dried her tears.

"It is not his fault," said Lady Markham, "we must be just. What could we do but what he has done? If we had known of it all along, we should never have thought of blaming him—and it is not his fault that it all burst upon us in a moment. It was not his fault," she said, shaking her head, "but you must not think I blame your dear papa. He meant it for the best. I can see how it all happened as distinctly——At first

he thought it would wound me to hear that he had been married before. And then—he forgot it altogether. You must remember how young he was, and what is a baby to a man? He forgot about it. I can see it all so plainly. The only thing is my poor Paul!" And here, after her defence of his father, the mother broke down too.

"Mamma," said Bell, "oh, don't cry, please don't cry! That is exactly what he says. He says he will do anything you like to tell him. He says he never wanted to do any harm. He is as sorry—as sorry! But how could he help being born, and being old—so much older than Paul? He says he is very fond of us all. He does not mind what he does if you will only let him come home and be the eldest brother. Mamma," said Bell, solemnly, struck with a new idea, "he must have saved my life, I think. I might have broken my neck, and there was nobody but Marie to run and get assistance. It was a very good thing for me that he was there. If he had not been there, you would have had—only five children instead of six," Bell said, with a gulp, swallowing the lump in her throat. She thought she saw herself being carried along all white and still,

and the thought overcame her with a sense of the pathos of the possible situation. She seemed to hear all the people saying, "Such a promising child and cut off in a moment;" and "Poor Lady Markham! just after her other great grief;" so that Bell could scarcely help sobbing over herself, though she had not been killed.

"Oh Bell! it was not so bad as that! how could you be killed coming down head over heels from the old tree?" cried Marie, almost with indignation.

Lady Markham had satisfied herself in the meantime that the lump on the forehead was more ugly than serious.

"Let us be very glad you have not suffered more," she said. "But, Bell, the right thing would be not to climb up there again."

"Mamma, the right thing would be, if you care about me, at least, to let poor Mr. Gus come in, and thank him for saving my life. Oh, let him come in, mamma! How could he help being older than Paul? I dare say he would rather have been younger if he could; and I am sure by what he says he would give Paul anything—anything! to make it up to him, and to make friends with you. He says how miserable he

would be if you left him here all alone. He could not bear to be down here thinking he had turned us out. Oh, if you had only seen him! he looked as if he could cry—Ask Marie. And he wanted to know if he might speak to Alice, if Alice would speak for him. But I said I didn't think it, because Paul was Alice's particular brother, and she could not bear anything that was hard upon him; and then he said," cried Bell, with unconscious embellishment, "'You are my two little sisters, oh, go and plead for me! Say I will do anything—anything—whatever she pleases.' Oh mamma! who could say more than that? He has nobody belonging to him, unless we will let him belong to us. He is a poor little gentleman, not young, nor nice-looking, nor clever, nor anything. And, mamma, he is a little—or more than a little, a great deal—*very* like poor papa. Oh!" cried Bell, breaking off with a suppressed shriek, as a hand suddenly was laid upon her shoulder.

Nobody had observed him coming in. A light little man, with a soft step, and soft unobtrusive shoes that never had creaked in the course of their existence, upon a soft Turkey carpet, makes very little sound as he moves. He had got tired waiting outside, and the doors

were open, and Mr. Gus had never been shy. He had walked straight in, guided by their voices; and the very fact that he had thus made his way within those curtains into this sanctuary seemed to give him at once a footing in the place. He put his hand upon Bell's shoulder, and, though he was not much taller than she was, made a very respectful bow to Lady Markham over her head.

"I thought I might take the liberty to come in and speak for myself, Lady Markham," he said. There was a flutter of his eyelids, giving that sidelong glance round him, which was the only thing that betrayed Gus's consciousness that the place to which "he had taken the liberty" of coming in was his own. "My little sisters" (he put his other hand upon the shoulder of Marie, who was much consoled at thus being brought back out of the cold into which Bell's superior gifts invariably sentenced her), "My little sisters can speak better for me than I can do; and won't you take me in for the sake of the little things who have always been my friends? It is not my fault that this all came upon you as a surprise. Don't you think it would be better for everybody—for the children, and for my poor father's

memory, and all, if you will just put up with having me in the house?"

Lady Markham grew very pale. She made a great effort, standing up to do it.

"Sir Augustus," she said, and nobody knew what it cost her to give him this title; all the blood ebbed away from her face: "Sir Augustus, the house is your own, it appears. What I can put up with has nothing to do with it."

"Yes," he said, tranquilly, bowing in acknowledgment, "it is my own; but it has been yours for a great many years. Why can't we be friends? I can't help being their brother, you know, whatever happens."

Alice had been sitting with her hand over her eyes. She had a special enmity towards this interloper; but now she took courage to look at him. They all looked at him, distinct among the little group of female faces. He was *dans son droit*, and it is impossible to tell how much the certainty that all belonged to him, that he was no mere claimant, but the proud possessor of the place, changed the aspect of the little gentleman, even to those who had most reason to be wounded by it. It gave him a dignity he had never possessed before, and a

magnanimity too. When he saw Alice looking at him, he left the little girls and came towards her, holding out his hands. He was a different man in this interior from what he was outside.

"I should be very fond of you if you would let me," he said. "Alice, though you are Paul's particular sister, you can't help being my sister too; and there is some one else who is a friend of mine, who has been very kind to me," the little man said significantly, sinking his voice.

What did he mean? Though she did not know what he meant, Alice felt a flame of colour flush over her cheeks in spite of herself.

"We are not monsters to disregard such an appeal," said Lady Markham. "Whatever may happen, and however we may feel, we must all acknowledge that you mean to be very kind. You will not ask us to say more just now. If you will send for your things, I will give orders to have your rooms prepared at once."

"Mamma!" they all cried, in a chorus of wonder. Alice with something like indignation, Bell and Marie with an excitement which was half pleasure: for this

was novelty, at least, if nothing else, which always commends itself to the mind of youth.

"If it is his right, he shall have it," said Lady Markham, with a quiver in her voice. "Mr. Scrivener tells me we must resist no longer—and he is your brother, as he says, and we have no right to reject his kindness. Do you know, children," she cried, suddenly clasping her hands together with an impatient movement, "while we are talking so much at our ease, it is not our own house we are in, but this gentleman's house? He can turn us out of it whenever he pleases, while we are arguing whether we will let him come into it! Sir," she said, rising up once more (but she had done it once; she could not again give him the title, which ought to have been Paul's)—"Sir, I acknowledge that you are kind, generous—far more than we have any right to expect—but you will understand that such a position is not easy—that it is very strange to me—and very new, and——"

"Certainly, ma'am," said Gus. Her politeness (as he called it to himself) put him on his mettle. "All you say is very true and just. If I were a little monster, as Alice thinks, there are a great many things I could

do to make myself disagreeable; and if you were not a sensible woman, as I always felt you to be, we might make a very pretty mess between us. But as we are not fiends, but good Christians (I hope), suppose you let the little ones come down with me to the village to see after my things? It's a nice afternoon, though a little dull. You ladies ought to go out too and take the air. My little dears," he said, "we'll have those big cases up; there are a lot of things in them I brought from Barbadoes expressly for you. And those sweetmeats—I told you of them the first time I came into this house."

"You said they were for me," said Marie, with a tone of reproach; "but that cannot have been true, for you did not know of me."

Gus had put one hand in Bell's arm and the other on Marie's shoulder. He looked at his two little companions with the sincerest pleasure in his little brown face.

"I did not know you were Marie, nor that this was Bell: but I knew that you were you," said the little gentleman, with a smile. "And," he added, looking round upon them all, "I knew we must be

friends sooner or later. Let's go and see after the cases now."

This was how it was all arranged, to the consternation and amazement of all the world; and Lady Markham was not less astonished than all the rest. She went to the Hall window when they were gone, and looked out after them, scarcely believing her senses. Sir Augustus Markham (as he must now be allowed to be) had put his arm into Bell's, who was nearly as tall as he was, and who had forgotten all about the bump on her forehead and the tear in her frock; while Marie held his other hand, and skipped along by his side, now in front, now behind, looking up into his face and chattering to him. There was in Gus's gait, in his trim little figure, and his personality in general, a something which was much more like Sir William than any of his other children. It had always been a little private source of gratification to Lady Markham, notwithstanding her sincere affection for her husband, that Paul was like the Fleetwoods, who were much finer men. But this resemblance, which she had not very much desired for her own children, had settled in the unknown offspring of his youth. It added now another pang to

her heartache, not only to see how like he was, but to see how entirely the children had adopted their new, yet old, brother. She withdrew from the window in a bewilderment of pain and excitement. What would Paul say to the step she had taken? It was right, she had felt. She had done what was the hardest to do, because it seemed evident that it was the best; but what would Paul say? And now that all hope and resistance was over, and nothing to be done but to submit and make the best of it, what was to become of her boy? Lady Markham had not the solace of knowing of the change that had taken place in Paul's mind. She expected nothing else than that her next meeting with Paul would be to take leave of him, to see him go away with his chosen associates; most likely the husband of Janet Spears, or about to become so. Could Janet Spears even now secure her son to her? bring him back? fix him in England?—at least within reach of her care and help? And should she—could she—do anything to persuade the girl to exercise her influence? That discussion, which had been broken by the sudden appearance of Bell, and this strange episode altogether, returned to her mind as she went sadly up stairs to

consult with Mrs. Fry about the rooms to be made ready for Sir Augustus. Poor Lady Markham! she would have to speak of him by this name, and to acknowledge to the servants the downfall of her own son, the descent of her own family to a lower place—Sir William's second family. It was hard—very hard—upon a woman who had been strong in a pride which had nothing bitter in it, so long as it had been unassailed, and all had gone well, but which gave her pangs now that were sufficiently difficult to bear. And then there was the dilemma in her heart still more difficult, still more painful. She had done what she thought was the best, at much cost to herself, in this matter; but ah, the other matter, which was still nearer her heart, how was she, torn as she was by diverse emotions, to know in Paul's case what was the best?

It would be needless to attempt to describe the excitement raised in the household by the announcement that "Sir Augustus" was "coming home," and that his rooms were to be got ready with all speed.

"My lady has give up the very best of everything," Mrs. Fry said, solemnly; "and as considerate, thinking which was to be the warmest, seeing as he's come from India, where it is *that* warm. It would not become us

as are only servants, to be more particular than my lady, or else I don't know that I could make it convenient to stay with a gentleman as has the blood of niggers in his veins."

"I knowed it!" Mr. Brown said, slapping his thigh; he was usually more guarded in his language, but excitement carries the day over grammar even with persons of more elevated breeding. "The last time as ever I helped him on with his coat there was something as told me it was him that was the man, and not Paul. Well! I don't say as I don't regret it in some ways, but pride must have a fall, as the Bible says."

"I don't see as it lays in your spere to quote the Bible on any such subject," said Mrs. Fry with indignation. "If it's Mr. Paul, I just wish he had a little more pride. His dear mother would be easier in her mind this day if he was one that held more by his own class. And if you're pleased, you that have eat their bread this fifteen years, to have a bit of a little upstart that is only half an Englishman, instead of your young master that you've seen grown up from a boy—and as handsome a boy as one could wish to see—I don't think much of your Christianity, and quoting out of the Bible. It's

easier a deal to do that than to perform what's put down there."

"I hope I knows my duty, ma'am," said Mr. Brown, resuming the dignity which excitement had momentarily shaken, "without instruction from you or any one."

"I hope you do, Mr. Brown," said Mrs. Fry. And this little passage of arms restored the equilibrium of these two important members of the household. But when it became known in the village and at the station, where the great cases which had been lying at the latter place were ordered by Sir Augustus to be carried to the house, and his portmanteau brought from the Markham Arms, and when slowly, through a hundred rills of conflicting information, the news got spread about the country till it flooded, like a rushing torrent, all the great houses and all the outlying villages—drove the Trevors and the Westlands half out of their senses, and communicated a sudden vertigo to the entire neighbourhood—words fail us to describe the commotion. Everybody had known there was something wrong, but who could have imagined anything so sweeping and complete. "You see now, mamma, how right I was to let Paul alone," Ada Westland said with her frank

cynicism. "We must see that your papa calls upon Sir Augustus," that far-seeing mother replied. As for old Admiral Trevor, who was getting more and more into his dotage every day, he ordered his carriage at once to go out and "putsh shtop to it." "Will Markham ought to be ashamed of himself," the old sailor said. The same impulse moved the inhabitants of the rectory, both father and daughter. Mr. Stainforth did nothing but go about his garden all day wringing his hands and crying, "Dear! dear!" and trying to recollect something about it, some way of proving an *alibi* or getting evidence to show that it was impossible. He, too, felt that it was his duty to put a stop to it. And as for Dolly, what could she do but cry her pretty eyes out, and wish, oh so vainly, that she had a hundred thousand pounds that she might give it all to Paul!

CHAPTER VIII.

LADY MARKHAM, when she thus received Sir Augustus, did so with no intention of herself remaining in the house which had been her home for so long. In any case, when the lawyer had pronounced that there was no longer any room for resistance, she would have yielded; she would not have prolonged a vain struggle, or given the new owner any trouble in gaining possession of his house. When she lay down that night for the first time under the same roof with the interloper, he who had, she said to herself, ruined her son's prospects, and taken his inheritance from him, she had not that satisfaction in her mind of having done her duty which is supposed to be the unfailing recompense of a good action. She had done her duty, she hoped. She did not think that she was justified in refusing

Sir Gus's overtures, or in turning him into an enemy; but it was with a sore heart and mind, much exercised with doubt, that she thought of what she had done. It was right in one way, but was it right in another? What would Paul think of her apparent alliance and friendship with the man who certainly had been his supplanter, and so far as any one could see had spoiled his life? Paul was Lady Markham's dearest son, but he was the darkest place in her landscape, the subject which she dwelt upon most, yet had least comfort in contemplating. Notwithstanding the love and anxiety which he called forth in her, all the questions connected with him were so painful that, if she could, she would have avoided them altogether. What was he going to do? Was he on the eve of the voyage which might separate him from her for ever? Was he on the eve of the marriage that would separate them still more? She longed and pined every day for letters from him, and yet when the post brought none, she was almost relieved. At least he was not going yet, at least he was not married yet. She wrote to him almost every day, and lavished upon him a thousand tendernesses, and yet it was no pleasure to her to think of Paul.

His very name brought an additional line to her forehead and quiver to her lip.

Next morning she was more undecided than ever. What was she to do? Again the post had come in, and Paul had not added a word to the information she had received. He had not said whether he was coming, or what he was going to do. It occurred to her as she was dressing that the presence of his stepbrother in the house might keep him away—that indeed it was almost certain to keep him away, and that this afforded an urgent reason for speedy removal. The idea gave her a sensation of hurry and nervous haste. There was a dower-house on the estate near the town of Farborough to which perhaps it would be well for her to retire. But when she thought of all that would be involved in the removal, Lady Markham's courage failed her. Why did not this man keep away? A few months she might at least have had to detach herself, to accustom herself to the change. It seemed hard, very hard, to face everything at once. Had she really been right after all in yielding? Ought she not to have stood out and made her bargain for time enough to prepare her removal tranquilly? In the days when a glow of satisfaction followed

every good action, there must have been more absolute certainty upon the subject, what was good and what was evil, than exists now. The kindness, the self-sacrifice of her act had made it appear the best, the only thing to do; but now came the cold shadow of doubt. Had not she compromised her dignity by doing it? Had not she done something that would offend and alienate Paul? The night not only had not brought counsel, but it had made all her difficulties worse.

When Lady Markham went downstairs, however, the first sight which met her eyes was one of at least a very conciliatory character. In the hall stood one of Gus's larger packing-cases, those cases which had been lying at the station for so long, opened at last, and giving forth its riches. The floor was covered with West Indian smeetmeats, pots of guava jelly, and ginger, and many other tropical dainties; while the two little girls, in high excitement, were taking out the stores which remained, the scented neck-laces and bark-lace, and all the curious manufactures of the island; they were speechless with delight and enthusiasm, yet bursting out now and then into torrents of questions, asking

about everything. Gus sat complacently in the midst of all the rubbish in the big bamboo-chair, stretching out his little legs and rubbing his hands. "I told you I brought them for you," he was saying. Bell and Marie could not believe their eyes as they saw the heaps that accumulated round them. "I thought you would like to give presents to your little friends; there is plenty for everybody."

"But oh! Mr. Gus," cried Marie, dancing about him, "how could you know just what we wanted? how could you tell we should have friends?"

It was pretty to see him sitting among the litter, his brown countenance beaming.

"I knew, of course, you must be nice children," he said; "I knew what you would want. But you must not call me Mr. Gus any longer. Call me Gus without the mister."

The two little girls looked at each other and laughed.

"But you are so old," they said.

"It's a pity, isn't it?" said the little gentleman.

They were as much at their ease together as if they had known him all their lives. What mother could resist such a scene? She paused on the stairs and

looked over the banisters and watched them. If it had not been for the tragedy involved, for her husband's death and her son's disinheritance, what more pleasant than this domestic scene! The children had never been so much at their ease with their father, nor would it have occurred to them to use half so much freedom with Paul as they did with the stranger Gus. Lady Markham's heart thrilled with pleasure and pain, and when at last she went downstairs, there was a tone of cordiality in spite of herself in her morning greeting.

"I fear I am a little late. I have kept you waiting," she said.

"Oh mamma! he has had his breakfast with us," cried the little girls.

"You must not mind me. I am from the tropics. I always rise with the dawn," said the little man. "But I am quite happy so long as I have the children."

He followed her into the breakfast-room, Bell linking herself on to his arm and Marie holding his hand. They brought in some of the sweetmeats with them, and the little girls began with great importance to open them, each making her offering to mamma. It was the first appearance of anything like cheerfulness since

grief had entered the house. While this little bustle was going on, Alice came in after her mother very quietly, hoping to avoid all necessity of speaking to the intruder. The feeling that was in her mind was that she could not endure to see him here, and that if her mother would not leave the place, she at least must. When Gus saw her, however, her hope of escape was over. He came up to her at once and took her hand, and made a little speech.

"You will not make friends with me as the children do," he said; "but you will find your old brother will always stand your friend if you want one."

Alice drew her hand away and escaped to her usual place with her cheeks blazing. Why did he offer to "stand her friend?" what did he mean by his reference last night to some one else? She knew very well what he meant—it was this that made it impertinent. He had met her two or three times with Mr. Fairfax, and no doubt had been so vulgar and disagreeable as to suppose that Mr. Fairfax—not having the least idea of course how they had been brought together, and that Mr. Fairfax's presence at Markham was entirely accidental! Alice knew perfectly well what Gus meant.

He thought the young man was an undistinguished lover, whom probably Lady Markham would not accept, but whom Alice was ready enough to accept, and it was in this light that he proffered his presumptuous and undesired help. Alice could not trust herself to speak. It seemed to her that besides the harm it had done Paul, there was another wrong to herself in these injudicious, unnecessary offers of assistance. She would not look at the curiosities the little girls carried in their frocks, folding up their skirts to make great pockets, nor taste their sweetmeats, nor countenance their pleasure. Instead of that, Alice wrapped herself up in abstraction and sadness. To be able to hide some sulkiness and a great deal of annoyance and bitter constraint under the mask of grief is often a great ease to the spirit. She had the satisfaction of checking all the glee of Marie and Bell, and of making even Lady Markham repent of the smile into which she had been beguiled.

Thus, however, the day went on. When Lady Markham again watched her children going down the avenue, one on either side of the new master of the house, with a softened look in her face, Alice turned away from her

mother with the keenest displeasure; she forsook her altogether, going away from her to her own room, where she shut herself up and began to make a review of all her little possessions with the view of removing them, somewhere, anywhere, she did not care where. And very dismal visions crossed the inexperienced mind of Alice. She did not know how this miserable change in the family affairs affected her own position or her mother's. She thought, perhaps, that they had lost everything, as Paul had lost everything. And sooner than live on the bounty of this stranger, Alice felt that there was nothing she could not do. She thought of going out as a governess, as girls do in novels. Why not? What was she better than the thousands of girls who did so, and rather that a hundred times, rather that or anything! Then it occurred to her that perhaps she might go with Paul. That, perhaps, would be a better way. Even in the former days, out of the midst of luxury and comfort, it had seemed to her that Paul's dream of living a primitive life and cultivating his bit of land, his just share of the universal possession of man, had something fine, something noble in it. With her brother she could go to the end of the world to sustain

and comfort him. What would she care what she did? Would she be less a lady if she cooked his dinner or washed his clothes? Nay, not at all. What better could any woman wish? But then there was this girl —the man's daughter who had been at Markham with Paul. Thus Alice was suddenly stopped again. Walls of iron seemed to rise around her wherever she turned. Was it possible, was it possible? Paul, who was so fastidious, so hard to please! Thus when despairing of the circumstances around herself she turned to the idea of her brother, her heart grew sick with a new and cruel barrier before her. An alien had come into her home and spoiled it; an alien was to share her brother's life and ruin that. All around her the world was breaking in with an insupportable intrusion—people who had nothing to do with her coming into the very sanctuary of her life. Lady Markham was going to put up with it, as it seemed, but Alice said to herself that she could not, would not, put up with it. She could not tell what she would do, or where she would flee, but to tolerate the man who had taken Paul's inheritance, or the woman who had got Paul's heart, was above her strength. Should she go out as a

governess? this seemed the one outlet; or—was there any other?

Now, how it was that Fairfax should have suddenly leaped into her mind with as startling an effect as if he had come through the window, or down from the sky in bodily presence, I cannot pretend to tell. For a little while he had been her chief companion—her helpmate, so to speak—and, at the same time, her servant, watching her looks to see what he could do for her—ready to fly, on a moment's notice, to supplement her services in the sick-room—making of himself, indeed, a sort of complement of her and other self, doing the things she could not do. He had been, not like Paul at home, for Paul had never been so ready and helpful, but like nothing else than a man-Alice, another half of her, understanding her before she spoke—doing what she wished by intuition. This had not lasted very long, it is true, but while it had lasted, it had been like nothing that Alice had ever known. She had said to herself often that she scarcely knew him. He had come into her life by accident, and he had gone out of it just as suddenly, and with an almost angry dismissal on her part. Scarcely knew him! and yet was there anybody that

she knew half so well? Why Fairfax should have suddenly become, as it were, visible to her in the midst of her thoughts, she did not know. One moment she could see nothing but those closing walls around her—a barrier here, a barrier there; no way of escape. When all at once, in the twinkling of an eye, there was a glimmer in the darkness, an opening, and there he stood, looking at her tenderly, deprecating, yet with a gleam of humour in his eyes. "You won't have anything to say to me," he seemed to be saying; "but all the same, if you should think better of it, I am here."

It is impossible to tell the effect this sudden apparition, as confusing as if he had actually come in person, had upon Alice. She was so angry, that she beat her hands together in sudden rage—with whom—with herself? for if the treacherous heart within her conjured up the young man's image, was it Mr. Fairfax's fault? But it was against him that she threw out all that unnecessary anger. How dared he come when she wanted none of him! To intrude yourself into a girl's presence when she does not want you is bad enough, but to leap thus into her imagination! it was insupportable. She struck her hands together with a kind

of fury—it was a way she had—her cheeks grew crimson, her heart thumped quite unnecessarily against her breast. And all the time he seemed to stand and look at her not tragically, or with any heroic aspect (which did not belong to him), but with that half smiling, half upbraiding look, and always a little gleam of fun in his eyes. "If you should think better of it, I am always here." The words she put into his mouth were quite characteristic of him. No high-flown professions of faithfulness and devotion could have said more.

Lady Markham had seen clearly enough that Alice was no longer in sympathy with her, and her heart bled for the separation and for the shadow in her child's face, even while she could not refuse to feel a certain satisfaction otherwise in the step she had taken. It is often easier to justify one's self to others than to respond to the secret doubts that arise in one's own bosom; but when the gloomy looks of Alice proclaimed the indictment that was being drawn up against her mother in her mind, Lady Markham, strangely enough, began to feel the balance turn, and a little self-assertion came to her aid. But she was very glad of the opportunity given her by a visit from the Rector to send for her

daughter, who had not come near her all the morning. The Rector was not a very frequent visitor at the Chase, nor indeed anywhere. He was old, and he was growing feeble, and he did not care to move about. It was, however, so natural that he should make his appearance in the trouble which existed in the house, that nothing but a visit of sympathy was thought of. And Dolly was with him, upon whom Lady Markham looked with different eyes—a little jealous, a little tender—ready to find out every evidence the girl might show of interest in Paul. There was abundant opportunity to judge of her feelings in this respect, for Paul was the chief subject spoken of. Mr. Stainforth had come with no other object. He led Lady Markham to the further end of the room while the two girls talked.

"I want to say something to you," he said. It was to ask what Paul was going to do—what his intentions were. "It breaks my heart to think of it," said the old man; "but we must submit to fate." He was something of a heathen, though he was a clergyman, and this was how he chose to put it: "What is he going to do?"

Alas! of all the subjects on which his mother could

have been questioned, this was the most embarrassing. She sighed, and said—

"I cannot tell. There were some schemes in his head —or rather he had been drawn into some schemes—of emigration—before all this sorrow came."

"Emigration! before——!"

The rector could not make this out.

"You know, that his opinions gave us some trouble. It was a—visionary scheme—for the advantage of other people," Lady Markham said.

"Ah! there must be no more of that, my dear Lady Markham; there must be no more of that. Socialism under some gloss or other, I know:—but life has become too serious with Paul now for any nonsense like that."

"I wish I could think he would see it in that light," said his mother, shaking her head.

"But he *must;* there is no choice left him. He must see it in that light. I do not know whether this that I am going to suggest ever came into your mind. Lady Markham, Paul must take the living, that is all about it. He must take orders; and as soon as he is ready, I will abdicate. I should have done so long ago had there been a son of the house coming on. He must

go into the Church—that is by far the best thing to do."

"The Church!" said Lady Markham, in extreme surprise. "I fear he would never think of that, Mr. Stainforth."

"Then he will be very foolish," said the old Rector. "What do these foolish young fellows mean? It is an excellent living, a good house, not too much to do, good society, and a good position. Suppose they don't like visiting old women, and that sort of thing, they can always get some one to do it for them—a curate at the worst, for that costs money; but most likely the ladies about. If he marries, which of course he would do, his wife would attend to that. There is Dolly, who saves me a great deal of trouble. She is quite as good as a curate. Oh, for that matter, there are as great drawbacks in the Church as in other professions. What do the young fellows mean, Lady Markham, to reject a very desirable life for such little annoyances as that?"

Lady Markham still shook her head notwithstanding the Rector's eloquence.

"Paul would not see it in that light," she said. "Unless he could throw himself into all the duties with

his whole heart, he would never do it, and I fear he would not be able to do that."

"This is nonsense," said Mr. Stainforth. The old man was very much in earnest. "I would soon show him that all that is really necessary is very easy to get through, and short of his natural position there would be none so suitable. He must think of it. I cannot think of anything that would be so suitable. The bar is overcrowded, he is not a fellow to think of the army, though, indeed," said the old man, with a cold-blooded determination to say out all he meant, "if there was a war, and men had a chance of good promotion, I don't know that I should say anything against that. But the Church, Lady Markham, the Church:—Almost as good a house as this is, if not so big, and a great deal of leisure. I assure you I could easily convince him that there is nothing he could choose which would not afford drawbacks quite as great. And, short of his natural position, the Rector of Markham Royal is not a bad thing to look to. He might marry well, and as probably the other will never marry——"

"Ah!" said Lady Markham, with her eyes full of tears, "it is easy to talk; but Paul would never lend any

ear to that. In all likelihood, so far as I know, his decision is already made. That is to say," she added with a sigh, "it was all settled before. Why should he change now when everything favours him? when Providence itself has moved all hindrances out of his way?"

"But he must not, Madam," cried the Rector, raising his voice. "What, emigrate! and leave you here in your widowhood with no one to stand by you! This is nonsense—nonsense, Lady Markham. I assure you, my dear Madam, it is impossible, it must not be."

Lady Markham smiled faintly through her tears. She shook her head. It seemed to her that the old Rector, with all his long life behind him, was so much less experienced, so much more youthful than she was. *Must* not be! What did it matter who said that so long as the boy himself did not say it? The Rector had so raised his voice that the two girls had an excuse for coming nearer, for asking, with their eyes at least, what it was.

"The Rector says Paul must not go; that he ought to go into the Church and succeed to the living. Ah!" cried Lady Markham, "it is so easy to say 'ought' and

'must not.' And what can I say? that he will do what he thinks right, not what we think right. What does any one else matter? He will do—what he likes himself."

Her voice was choked—her heart was very sore. Never had she breathed a word of censure upon Paul to other ears than perhaps those of Alice before. Her usual strength had forsaken her. And Alice, who was estranged and chilled, did not go near her mother. Dolly Stainforth had never been brought up to neglect her duties in this particular. Her business in life had always been with people who were in trouble; a kind of professional habit, so to speak, delivered her from shyness even when her own feelings were concerned. She went up quickly to the poor lady who was weeping, without restraint, and took her hand in those soft little firm hands which had held up so many. Not so much a shy girl full of great tenderness as a little celestial curate, devoted everywhere to the service of the sorrowful, she did not blush or hesitate, but with two big tears in her eyes spoke her consolation.

"Oh dear Lady Markham," Dolly said, "are you not proud, are you not happy to know that it is only what

he thinks right that he will do? What could any one say more? Papa does not know him as—as *you* do. He thinks he might be persuaded, though his heart would not be in it; but you—you would not have him do that? I—" said Dolly all unawares, betraying herself with a little sob in her throat and her voice sinking so low as almost to be inaudible—"I" (as if she had anything to do with it! strong emotion gave her such importance) "would rather he should go—than stay like that!"

Lady Markham clasped her fingers about those two little firm yet tremulous hands. It was the kind of consolation she wanted. She put up her face to kiss Dolly, who straightway broke down and cried, and was an angel-curate no longer. By this time herself had come in, and her own deep-seated, childish preference, which she had not known to be love. "Tch—tch—tch," said the Rector under his breath, thinking within himself some common thought about the ridiculousness of women, even the best. But already there were other spectators who had seen and heard some portion of what was going on. It was the worst of Lady Markham's pretty room that it was liable to be approached without

warning. Alice suddenly sprang up with a cry of astonishment, dismay, and delight. "Paul!" she cried, startling the whole party as if a shell had fallen among them. The young man stood within the half-drawn curtains with a pale and serious face, looking at the group. His mother thought of but one thing as she looked up and saw him before her. He had come to tell her that now all was over, and nothing remaining but the last farewell to say.

The rest of the party did not see, however, what Alice, who was detached from them saw, that there was some one beyond the curtains, hanging outside as one who had no right to enter—a little downcast, but yet, as always, faintly amused by the situation. The sight of him gave her a shock as of a dream come true. "If you should think better of it," he seemed to be saying. The sudden apparition, with the smile about the corners of his lips which seemed so familiar, startled her as much as the appearance which her imagination had called forth a few hours before.

CHAPTER IX.

THE presence of Mr. Stainforth and his daughter added another embarrassment to the sudden arrival of Paul. His mother did not know what to say to him, how to restrain her questions,—how to talk of his health and his occupations, if the journey had been pleasant, how he had come from the station, and all the other trivialities which are said to a visitor suddenly arriving. She had to treat Paul like a visitor while the others were there. Paul for his part answered these matter-of-course questions very briefly. He had an air of suffering both mentally and bodily, and he was very pale. He looked at Dolly Stainforth, and said nothing, sitting in the shade as far from the great window as possible. And the Rector would not go away. He sat and put innumerable questions to the new-comer. What he was

going to do? What he thought of this thing and the other? Of course he was going back to Oxford to take his degree? that was the one thing that was indispensable. Paul gave the shortest possible answers to every question, and they were not of a satisfactory description. His mother, anxiously watching and fretting beyond measure to be thus kept in suspense about his purposes, could get no information from what he said to Mr. Stainforth, nor did the earnest gaze she had fixed upon him bring her any more enlightenment. Alice had gone out beyond the shade of the curtains to speak to Fairfax, and the embarrassment of the four thus left together was extreme. Dolly had not spoken a word since Paul entered. She had given him her hand, no more, when he came in, but she did not speak to him or even raise her head, except to listen with something of the same breathless anxiety as was apparent in Lady Markham's face, while the old Rector went on with his questions and advices. The two women trembled in concert with a mutual sense of intolerable suspense, scarcely able to bear it. Dolly knew, however, that she would have to bear it, that she had nothing to do with the matter, that the only service she could do them was to relieve the

mother and son of her presence and that of her father, who, however, after she had at length got him to his feet, still stood for ten minutes at least holding Paul's hand and impressing a great many platitudes upon his attention—with "Depend upon it, my dear boy," and "You may take my word for it." Paul had no mind to depend upon anything he said or to take his word for it in any way. He stood saying "Yes" and "No," or replying only with a nod of his head to his mentor. But Mr. Stainforth was not at all aware that he had stayed a second too long. He blamed Dolly for the haste with which she had hurried him away. "But I am glad I had the opportunity of seeing Paul," the old man said complacently, as his daughter drove him down the avenue. "You must have seen how pleased he was to talk his circumstances over with such an old friend as myself. Poor fellow, that is just what he must most want now. The ladies are very much attached to him, of course, but with the best intentions in the world, how can they know? He wants a man to talk to," said Mr. Stainforth; and "I suppose so, papa," Dolly said.

Lady Markham turned to her son as soon as the Rector's back was turned, her face quivering with

anxiety. "Paul? Paul?" she said with the intensest question in her tone, though she asked nothing, seizing him by both hands.

"Well, mother?" He met her eye with something of the old impatience in his voice.

"You have come to tell me——?" she said breathless.

"I don't know what I have come to tell you. I have come to collect some of my things. You speak as if I had some important decision to make. You forget that there is nothing important about me, mother, one way or another," Paul said with a smile. It was an angry smile, and it did not reassure his anxious hearer. He gave a little wave with his hand towards the larger room. "Fairfax is with me," he said.

"Mr. Fairfax! I thought we might have had you to ourselves for this time at least." There was a querulous tone in her voice. He did not know that she was thinking of what he considered an old affair, of a separation which might be for ever. All that had been swept away completely out of Paul's mind as if it had never been, and he could not comprehend her anxiety. "But," she added, recollecting herself, "I might have known that could not be. Paul, I don't know what you will

say to me. I was in a great difficulty. I did not know what to do. I have let *him* come to the house. He is here, actually staying here now."

"*He!* What do you mean by *he?*" Then while she looked at him with the keenest anxiety, a gleam of understanding and contemptuous anger came over his face. "Well!" he said, "I suppose you could not shut him out of what is his own house."

"I might have left it, my dear. I intend to leave it——"

"Why?" he said; "if you can live under the same roof with him, why not? Do you think I will have any objection? It cannot matter much to me."

It was all settled then! She looked at him wistfully with a smile of pain, clasping her hands together. "He is very friendly, Paul. He wants to be very kind. And it is better there should be no scandal. I have your—poor father's memory to think of—"

Paul's face again took its sternest look. "It is a pity he himself had not thought a little of what was to come after. I am going to put my things together, mother."

"But you will stay, you are not going away to-night—not directly, Paul!"

"Shall I have to ask Sir Gus's leave to stay?" he said with a harsh laugh.

"Oh, Paul, you are very unkind, more unkind than he is," said Lady Markham, with tears in her eyes. "He has never taken anything upon him. Up to this moment it has never been suggested to me that I was not in my own house."

"Nevertheless, it is his," said her son. He made a step or two towards the opening, then turned back with some embarrassment. "Mother, it is possible—I do not say likely—but still it is possible: that—Spears may come here to make some final arrangements to-morrow, before he goes."

"Oh Paul!" she said, with a low cry of pain: but there was nothing in this exclamation to which he could make any reply. He hesitated for a moment, then turned again and went away. Lady Markham stood where he had left her, clasping her hands together against her bosom as if to staunch the wounds she had received and hide them, feeling the throb and ache of suffering go over her from head to foot. She felt that he was merciless, not only abandoning her without a word of regret, but parading before her his preparations

for this mad journey, and the new companions who were to replace his family in his life. But Paul only thought she was displeased by the name of Spears. He went his way heavily enough, going through the familiar place which was no longer home, to the room which had been his from his childhood, but was his no longer. As if this was not pain enough, there was looming before him, threatening him, this shadow of a last explanation with Spears. What was there to explain to Spears? He could not tell. Others had deserted the undertaking as well as he. And Paul would not say to himself that there was another question, though he was aware of it to the depths of his being. Not a word had been said about Janet; yet it was not possible but that something must be said on that subject. His whole life was still made uncertain, doubtful, suspended in a horrible uncertainty because of this. What honour demanded of him, Paul knew that he must do; but what was it that honour demanded? It was the last question of his old life that remained to be settled, but it was a bitter question. And just when it had to be decided, just when it was necessary that he should brave himself to do what might

turn out to be his duty, why, why was he made the hearer unawares of Dolly's little address in his defence? She had always stood up for him; he remembered many a boyish offence in which Dolly, a mere baby, uncertain in speech, had stood up for him. If he had to do *this*—which he did not describe to himself in other words—Dolly would still stand up for him. With all these thoughts in his mind as he went upstairs, Paul was far too deeply occupied to think much of the personage whom he contemptuously called Sir Gus—Sir Gus was only an accident, though a painful and almost fatal one, in the young man's path.

When Lady Markham had sufficiently overcome the sharp keenness of this latest wound, her ear was caught by a murmur of voices in the other room. This had been going on, she was vaguely sensible, for some time through all Mr. Stainforth's lingering and leavetaking, and through her own conversation with Paul; voices that were low and soft—not obtrusive; as if the speakers had no wish to attract attention, or to have their talk interfered with. Perhaps this tone is of all others the most likely to provoke any listener into interruption. A vague uneasiness awoke in Lady Markham's mind.

She put back the curtains which had partially veiled the entrance to her own room with a slightly impatient hand. When one is wounded and aching in heart and mind, it is so hard not to be impatient. Alice had seated herself in a low chair, half hidden in one of the lace curtains that veiled a window, and Fairfax was leaning against the window talking to her. There was something tender and confidential in the sound of his voice. It was he who spoke most, but her replies were in the same tone, a tone of which both were entirely unconscious, but which struck Lady Markham with mingled suspicion and alarm. How had these two got to know each other well enough to speak in such subdued voices? She had never known or realised how much they had been thrown together during her absence in the sick room. When she drew back the curtain, Alice instinctively withdrew her chair a hair's breadth, and Fairfax stood quite upright, leaning upon the window no longer. This alteration of their attitudes at the sight of her startled Lady Markham still more. Fairfax came forward hurriedly as she came into the drawing-room, a little flushed and nervous.

"I hope you will not consider this visit an imper-

tinence," he said. "I thought I must come with Markham to take care of him. He—twisted his foot—did he tell you? It is all right now, but I thought it would be well to come and take care of him," Fairfax said, with that conciliatory smile and unnecessary repetition which marked his own consciousness of a feeble cause.

"I did not hear anything about it," Lady Markham said. "He has been writing me very short letters. You are very kind, Mr. Fairfax—very kind; we know that of old."

"That is the last name to give my selfish intrusion," he said; then added, after a pause, "And I had something I wanted to speak to you about. Did Miss Markham," he said, hesitating, shifting from one foot to the other, and showing every symptom of extreme embarrassment—"Did Miss Markham tell you—what I had been saying to her?"

Alice had taken occasion of her mother's entry upon the scene to rise from her chair and come quite out of the shelter of the curtain. She was standing (as indeed they all were) immediately in front of the window, with the light full upon her, when he put this question. He

looked from Lady Markham to her as he spoke, and by bad luck caught Alice's eye. Then—why or wherefore, who could say?—the countenances of these two foolish young people suddenly flamed, the one taking light from the other, with the most hot and overwhelming blush. Alice seemed to be enveloped in it; she felt it passing over her like the sudden reflection of some instantaneous flame. She shrank back a step, her eyes fell with an embarrassment beyond all power of explanation. As for Fairfax, he stole a second guilty look at her, and stopped short—his voice suddenly breaking off with a thrill in it, like that of a cord that has snapped. Lady Markham looked on at this extraordinary pantomime with consternation. What could she think, or any mother? She felt herself grow crimson, too, with alarm and distress.

"What was it you were saying, Mr. Fairfax? Alice has not said anything to me."

"O—oh!" he said; then gave a faint little laugh of agitation and confusion, and something that sounded strangely like happiness. "It was—nothing—not much — something of very little importance — only about myself. Perhaps you would let me have a

little conversation, when it is quite convenient, Lady Markham, with you?"

"Surely," she said, but with a coldness she could not restrain. What a thing it is to be a mother! The sentiment has found utterance in Greek, so it does not profess to be novel. If not one thing, then another; sometimes two troubles together, or six, as many as she has children—except that, in the merciful dispensation of Providence, the woman who has many children cannot make herself so wretched about every individual as she who has few contrives to do. Only Paul and Alice however were old enough to give their mother this kind of discipline, and in a moment she felt herself plunged into the depths of a second anxiety. There was a very uncomfortable pause. Alice would have liked to run away to her room, to hide herself in utter shame of her own weakness, but dared not, fearing that this would only call the attention of the others more forcibly to it—as if anything was wanted to confirm that impression! She stood still, therefore, for a few minutes, and made one or two extremely formal remarks, pointing out that the days were already much shorter and the afternoon beginning to close in. Both

her companions assented, the one with tender, the other with suspicious and alarmed glances. Then it occurred to Alice to say that she would go and see if Paul wanted anything. The others watched her breathless as she went away.

"Mr. Fairfax, what does this mean?" said Lady Markham, almost haughtily.

Was it not enough to make the politest of women forget her manners? Fairfax did not know, any more than she did, what it meant. He hoped that it meant a great deal more than he had ever hoped, and his heart was dancing with sudden pride and happiness.

"It means," he said, "dear Lady Markham, what you see: that I have forgotten myself, and that being nobody, I have ventured to lift my eyes—oh, don't imagine I don't know it!—to one who is immeasurably above me—to one who—I won't trust myself to say anything about her—*you* know," said the young man. "How could I help it? I saw her—though it was but for a little while—every day."

"When her father was dying!" cried Lady Markham, with a sob. This was what went to her heart. Her Alice, her spotless child—to let this stranger woo her in

the very shadow of her father's death-bed. She covered her face with her hands. Paul had not wrung her heart enough; there was one more drop of pain to be crushed out.

"I did not think of that. I did not think of anything, except that I was there—in a paradise I had no right to be in—by her side: heaven knows how. I had so little right to it that it looked like heaven's own doing, Lady Markham. I did not know there was any such garden of Eden in the world," he said. "I never knew there was such a woman as you; and then she—that was the crown of all. Do you think I intended it? I was surprised out of my senses altogether. I should have liked to stretch myself out like a bit of carpet for you to walk on: and she——"

"Mr. Fairfax, this is nonsense," said Lady Markham, but in a softened tone. "My daughter is just like other girls; but when I was compelled to leave her, when my other duties called me, could I have supposed that a gentleman would have taken advantage——"

"Ah!" he said, with a tone of profound discouragement, "perhaps that is what it is—perhaps it may be because I am not what people call a gentleman."

"Mr. Fairfax!" cried Lady Markham, with horror in her voice.

"Yes," he said, with a sigh, "it is out now; that is what I wanted to ask if Miss Markham had told you. I am nobody, Lady Markham. I don't belong to the Wiltshire Fairfaxes, or to the Fairfaxes of the north, or to any Fairfaxes that ever were heard of: I told her so. I did not want to come into your house under false pretences; and it was *that* that I meant to ask Miss Markham when — I betrayed myself."

"*You* betrayed yourself?" Lady Markham was entirely bewildered; for to her it appeared that it was Alice who had betrayed herself. But this new statement calmed and restrained her. If he had not remarked, perhaps, the agitation of Alice, it was not for her mother to point it out. "Am I to understand, Mr. Fairfax, that you said anything to Alice, when you were here in the midst of our trouble——?"

"No," he cried out; "surely no. What do you take me for?"

She put out her hand to him with her usual graciousness: "For a gentleman, Mr. Fairfax; and the

kindest heart in the world. Of course I knew there must be some mistake."

But when they had gone through this explanation and reconciliation, they came back simultaneously to a recollection of that blaze of sudden colour on Alice's face, and felt the one with rapture, the other with great alarm and tribulation, that in respect to this there could not be any mistake.

"But, Lady Markham," said the young man, "all this does not alter my circumstances. You are very kind and good to me; but here are the facts of the case. I have seen her now; none of us can alter that. It was not, so to speak, my doing. It was—accident, as people say. When a man has had a revelation like this, he does not believe it is an accident; he knows," said Fairfax, with a slight quiver of his lip, "that something higher than accident has had to do with it. And it can't be altered now. When that comes into a man's heart, it is for his life. And, at the same time, I confess to you that I am nobody, Lady Markham—not fit to tie her shoe; but I might be a prince, and not good enough for that. What is to be done with me? Am I to be put to the door once for all, and never to

come near her again? Whatever you say I am to do, I will do it. I believe in you as I do in heaven. What you tell me, I will do it; though it may make an end of me, it shall be done all the same."

"Did you come to Markham all the way to say this to me, Mr. Fairfax?" Lady Markham put the question only to gain a little time.

"No; I came pretending it was to take care of Paul, who *did* twist his foot—that is true; and pretending that it was to ask you to persuade him to let me help him (I know a few people and that sort of thing," said Fairfax hurriedly); "but I believe, if I must tell the truth, it was only just to have the chance of getting one look at her again. That was all. I did not mean to be so bold as to say a word—only to see her again."

"You wanted to help Paul!" Lady Markham felt her head going round. If he was nobody, how could he help Paul? The whole imbroglio seemed more than she could fathom. And Fairfax was confused too.

"There are some little things—that I have in my power: I thought, if he would let me, I might set him in the way——: I'll speak of all that another time,

Lady Markham. When a thing like this gets the upper hand, one can't get one's head clear for anything else. Now that I have betrayed myself, which I did not mean to, tell me—tell me what is to be done with me. I cannot think of anything else."

What was to be done with him? It is to be feared that, kind as Lady Markham was, she would have made but short work with Fairfax, had it been he only who had betrayed himself. But the light that had blazed on the face of Alice was another kind of illumination altogether. A hasty sentence would not answer here.

CHAPTER X.

It would have been difficult to imagine a more embarrassed and embarrassing party than were the Markham family, when they assembled to dinner that evening. Sir Gus and the little girls had met Fairfax going down the avenue, and had tried every persuasion in their power to induce him to return with them; but he would not do so. "I am coming back to-morrow," he said; but for this evening he was bound for the Markham Arms, where he had been before, and nothing would move him from his determination.

When Gus went into the drawing-room with his little companions, the tea was found there, all alone in solitary dignity; the table set out, the china and silver shining, the little kettle emitting cheerful puffs of steam, but no one visible. What can be more dismal

than this ghost of the cheerfullest of refreshments—the tea made and waiting, but not a woman to be seen? It impressed this innocent group with a sense of misfortune.

"Where can they be?" Bell cried; and she ran upstairs, sending her summons before her: "Mamma—mamma—please come to tea."

By and by, however, Bell came down looking extremely grave.

"Mamma has a headache," she said. This was a calamity almost unknown at Markham. "And Alice has a headache too," she added, after a moment's pause.

Bell's looks were very serious, and the occasion could scarcely be called less than tragical. The little girls themselves had to make Gus's tea—they did it, as it were, in a whisper—one putting in the sugar, the other burning her fingers with the tea-pot. It was not like afternoon tea at all, but like some late meal in the schoolroom when Mademoiselle had a headache. It was only Mademoiselle who was given to headache at Markham. It was Brown who told Sir Augustus of Paul's arrival. Lady Markham had been wounded by

Brown's behaviour from the first. He had not clung to the "family" to which he had expressed so much devotion. He had gone over at once to the side of the new master of the house. He had felt no indignation towards the interloper, nor any partisanship on behalf of Paul. He came up now with his most obsequious air, as Gus came out of the drawing-room.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Augustus, but Mr. Paul has come."

"Oh, he has come, has he?" Gus said.

Brown stood respectfully ready, as if he would undertake at the next word to turn Mr. Paul out of the house; no wonder Lady Markham was indignant. Gus understood it all now—the headaches and the deserted tea-table. No doubt the mother and sister were with Paul, comforting and consoling him. He gave forth a little sigh when he thought of it. Whatever might happen, no one would ever console him in that way. Paul had always the better of him, even when disinherited. But when they went into the drawing-room before dinner, he was very anxious to be friendly to Paul. He went up to him holding out his hand.

"I am very glad that we meet like this," he said.

"Your mother has taken me in, for which I am grateful to her; and I am very glad that we have met. I hope you will not think any worse of me than you can help."

"I do not think worse of you at all," Paul said, briefly; but he would not enter into conversation. And the whole party were silent. Whether it was the influence of the son's return, who was nothing now but a secondary person in the house where he had been the chief, or whether there was any other cause beside, Gus could not tell. Even the mother and daughter did not talk to each other. When dinner was over, and Mr. Brown, with his too observant eyes, was got rid of, the forlorn little stranger, who was the new baronet, the conqueror, the master of the situation, could almost have wept, so lonely and left out did he feel.

"Is anything going to happen?" he said. "I know I am no better than an outsider among you, but I would like to enter into everything that concerns you, if you would let me. Is anything going to happen?"

"I don't know of anything that is going to happen," said Paul; and the ladies said nothing. There was no longer that intercourse of looks between them, of half-

words and rapid allusions, which Gus admired. They sat, each wrapped as in a cloud of her own. And rarely had a night of such confused melancholy and depression been spent at Markham. Alice, who feared to encounter any examination by her mother. went upstairs again, scarcely entering the drawing-room at all. And Lady Markham sat alone amid all the soft, yet dazzling, lights, which again seemed to blaze as they had blazed when Sir William was dying, suggesting the tranquil household peace which seemed now over for ever. Was it over for ever? The very room in which she was seated was hers no longer. Her son was hers no longer, but about to be lost to her—separated by wide seas, and still more surely by other associations, and the severance of the heart. And even Alice—Lady Markham could not reconcile herself to the thought that while her husband was dying, and she watching by his side, Alice had allowed herself to be drawn into a new life and new thoughts. It seemed an impiety to him who was gone. Everything was impiety to him: the stranger in his place, though that stranger was his son; the shattering of his image, though it was his own hand that had done it; the dispersion of his children. Thank God! three

were still the little ones. She thought, with a forlorn pang in her heart, that she would withdraw herself with them to the contracted life of the Dower-house, and there reconstruct her domestic temple. Bell and Marie, Harry and Roland, would retain the idea of their father unimpaired, as Paul and Alice could not do. But what does it matter that all is well with the others when one of your children is in trouble? it is always the lean kine that swallow up those that are fat and flourishing. Her heart was so sore with the present that she could not console herself with the future. How could it be that Job was comforted with other sons and daughters, instead of those he had lost? How many a poor creature has wondered over this! Can one make up for another? Lady Markham sat all alone, half suffocated with unshed tears. Paul was going away, and she had not the courage to go to Alice, to question her, to hear that in heart she also had gone away. Thus she sat disconsolate in the drawing-room, while Gus took possession of the library. The poor little gentleman was still sadder than Lady Markham; not so unhappy, but sadder, not knowing what to do with himself. The long evening alone appalled him. He took a book, but

he was not very fond of reading. The children had gone to bed. He went to the window once, and, looking out, saw a red spark, moving about among the trees, of Paul's cigar. Probably, if he joined him, it would only be to feel more the enormity of his own existence. Gus went back to his chair, and drawing himself close to the fire (which Mr. Brown had caused to be lighted, reflecting that Sir Augustus was a foreigner, and might feel chilly), fell asleep there, and so spent a forlorn evening all by himself. Was this what he had come to England for, to struggle for his rights, and make everybody unhappy? It was not a very lofty end after all.

And next day there was so much to be settled. Paul was astir early, excited and restless, he could not tell why. It seemed to him that one way or other his fate was to be settled that day. If Janet Spears clung to him, if she insisted on keeping her hold upon him, what was he to do? He went down very early to the village, wandering about all the places he had known. He had never been very genial in his manners with the poor people, but yet he had been known to them all his life, and received salutations on all sides. Some of them

still called him Sir Paul. They knew he was not his father's successor—that there was another and altogether new name in the Markham family — but the good rustics, many of them, could not make out how, once having been Sir Paul to their certain consciousness, he could ever cease to bear that title. The name brought back to the young man's mind the flash of finer feeling, the subdued and sorrowful elation with which he had walked about these quiet roads on the morning of his father's funeral. He had meant to lead a noble life among these ancestral woods. All that his father was and more, he had intended to be. He had meant to show his gratitude for having escaped from the snare of those follies of his youth which had nearly cast him away, by tolerance and help to those who were like himself. In politics, in the management of the people immediately within his influence, he had meant to give the world assurance of a man. But now that was all over. In his place was poor little Gus: and he himself had neither influence nor power. What a change it was! He strayed into the churchyard to his father's grave, still covered with flowers, and then—why not?—he thought he would go up to the rectory and ask them

to give him some breakfast. Though he did not care enough for Gus to avoid his presence, yet it was a restraint; there never, he thought, could be any true fellowship between them. He went and tapped at the window of the breakfast-room which he knew so well, and where Dolly was making the tea. She opened it to him with a little cry of pleasure. Dolly had not made any pretence of putting on mourning when Sir William died, but ever since she had worn her black frock; nobody could reproach her with encroaching upon the privileges of the family by this, for a black frock was what any one might wear; but Paul, who was ignorant, was touched by her dress. She had been looking pale when she stood over the table with the tea-caddy, but when she saw who it was Dolly bloomed like a winter-rose. It was October now, the leaves beginning to fall, and a little fire made the room bright, though the weather was not yet cold enough for fires. Paul had never once considered himself in love with Dolly in the old days. Perhaps it was only the contrast between her and Janet Spears that moved him now. He knew that one way or other the question about Janet Spears would have to be concluded before the

day was done; and this consciousness made Dolly fairer and sweeter to him than ever she had been before.

And the rector was very glad to see Paul. He understood the young man's early visit at once. Mr. Stainforth had never entertained any doubt on the subject. To talk over his affairs with a man of experience and good sense must be a very different thing from discussing them with ladies, however sensible; and he plunged into good advice to the young man almost before he began his tea.

"There is one thing I am certain you ought to do," Mr. Stainforth said, "I told your mother so yesterday. I am an old man and I cannot stand long in any one's way. Paul, you must take orders; that is what you must do: and succeed me in the living. It is a thing which has always been considered an excellent provision for a second son; among your own people—and you know that this is an excellent house. Dolly will show you all over it. For a man of moderate tastes it is as good as Markham, and not expensive to keep up. And as for the duty, depend upon it, my dear boy, you would find no difficulty about that. Why, Dolly does the

most part of the parish work. Of course you could not have Dolly," said the old man, at his ease, not thinking of how the young ones felt, "but somebody would turn up. It is a good position and it is not a hard life. As soon as I heard what had happened I said to myself at once, the living is the very thing for Paul."

Paul could not help a furtive glance round him, a momentary review of the position, a rapid imperceptible flash of his eyes towards Dolly, who sat very demurely in front of the tea-urn. How glad she was of that tea-urn! But he shook his head.

"I am afraid I shall not be able to settle myself so easily as that," he said.

"But why not, why not?" asked the old man; and he went on expatiating upon the advantages of this step. "I would retire as soon as you were ready. I have often thought of retiring. It is Dolly rather than I that has wanted to remain. Dolly seems to think that she cannot live away from Markham Royal."

"Oh, no, papa," Dolly cried, "it was only because there was no reason. I could live—anywhere."

"I know what you will do," said the old man, "when I am gone, you will come back and flutter like a little

ghost about your schools and your poor people: you will think nobody can manage them but yourself; unless you marry, you know—unless you marry. That would make a difference. For the peace of the new rector I must get you married, Dolly, before I receive notice to quit, my dear."

And he laughed with his old shrill laugh, not thinking what might be going on in those young bosoms. That Dolly should marry anybody was a joke to her father, and that Paul should have any feeling on the subject never occurred to him. He cackled and laughed at his own joke, and then he became serious, and once more impressed all the advantages of the living upon his visitor. The curious mingling of confusion, embarrassment, distress, and pleasure with which the two listened it would be difficult to describe. Even Dolly, though she was abashed and horrified by the two simple suggestions which the old man neither intended nor dreamt of, felt a certain vague shadowy pleasure in it, as of a thing that never could come true but yet was sweet enough as a dream; and because of the tea-urn which hid her from Paul, felt safe, and was almost happy in the thrill of consciousness which ran to her

finger tips. They did not see each other, either of them: and this was a thing which was impossible, never to be. But yet it put them by each other's side as if they were going to set out upon life together, and the sensation was sweet.

Paul turned it over and over in his head as he went home. It was not the life he would have chosen, but the old man's materialistic view of it had for the moment a charm. The sheltered quiet life, the mild duty, the ease and leisure, with no struggle or trouble to attain to them—was it a temptation? He laughed out as he asked himself the question. No! Paul might perhaps have been a missionary after the apostolic model; but a clergyman with very little to do and a wife to do the great part of that little for him—no, he said to himself, no! And then he sighed—for the rectory, under those familiar skies, and little Dolly, whom he had known since she was a baby, were very sweet.

It was something very different for which he had to prepare himself now. As he walked towards home he suddenly came in sight, as he turned the village corner into the high road, of a pair who were walking on

before him from the station. Paul's heart gave a sudden leap in his breast, but not with joy. He stood still for a moment, then went on, making no effort to overtake them. A man and a woman plodding along the dusty road: he with the long strides and clumsy gait of one who was quite destitute of that physical training which gives to the upper classes so much of their superiority, his arms swinging loosely from his shoulders; she encumbered with the skirt of her dress, which trailed along the dusty road. The sun was high by this time, and very warm, and they felt it. Paul did not take his eyes from them as they went along, but he made no effort to make up to them. This was what he had played with in the time of his folly—what he thought he had chosen, without ever choosing it. What could he do, what could he do, he cried out in his heart with the vehemence of despair, to be clear of it now?

Spears had come to settle his accounts with Paul. In the course of the negotiation which had gone so far, which had gone indeed as far as anything could go not to be settled and concluded, he had received money from the young man for his share of the emigration capital. That Paul, when he separated himself from the party meant

to leave this with them as a help to them, there was no doubt; and this was one reason why he had avoided meeting with his old associates, or ending formally the connection between them. And when Spears demanded that a place of meeting should be appointed, Paul had with reluctance decided upon Markham as a half-way house, where he would have the help of his mother to smooth down and mollify the demagogue. Spears had been deeply compunctious for the part he had taken against Paul in London, but was also deeply wounded by Paul's refusal to accept his self-humiliation; and his object in seeking him now was not, as Paul thought, to reproach him for his desertion, nor was it to call him to account on the subject of Janet. Paul himself was not sufficiently generous, not noble enough to understand the proud and upright character of the humble agitator, who carried the heart of a prince under his working man's clothes, and to whom it was always more easy to give than to take. Spears was coming with a very different purpose. With the greatest trouble and struggle he had managed to reclaim, and separate from the other money collected, the sum paid by Paul. It had been not only a wonderful blow to his personal pride and his

affections, but it diminished greatly his importance among his fellows when it was discovered that the young aristocrat, of whose adhesion they were inconsistently proud, was no longer under the influence or at the command of Spears; and it had cost him not only a great deal of trouble to collect Paul's money, but a sacrifice of something of his own; and he had so little! Nevertheless, he had it all in his pocket-book when he prepared that morning to keep the rendezvous which Paul had unwillingly given him.

Spears did not know till the last moment that his daughter meant to accompany him. She walked to the station with him, and took his ticket for him, and he suspected nothing. It was not until she joined him in the railway carriage that he understood what she meant, and then it was too late to remonstrate. Besides, his daughter told him it was Lady Markham she was going to see. Lady Markham had been very kind to her. It was right that she should go to say goodbye; "and besides, you know, father—" Janet said. Yes, he knew, but he did not know much; and Janet was aware, as Paul was not, that her father was far too delicate, far too proud, to speak on her behalf. He

would scorn to recall his daughter to any one who had forgotten her; if there was anything to be done for Janet, it was herself who must do it. And Spears was so uncertain about the whole business, so unaware of what she was going to do, that he did not even try to prevent her. He accepted her society accordingly, and did not attempt to resist her will. She had a right, no doubt, to look after her own affairs; and he who did not even know what these affairs were, what could he say? They had a very silent journey, finding little to say to each other. His mind was full of saddened and embittered affection, and of a proud determination not to be indebted to a friend who had deserted him. "Rich gifts grow poor when givers prove unkind," he was saying to himself. Undoubtedly it had given him importance, the fact that the richest of all the colonists was under his influence, and ready to do whatever he might suggest. Not for a moment, however, would Spears let this weigh with him. Yet it made his heart all the sorer in spite of himself. As for Janet, she had a still more distinct personal arrangement on her hands. They scarcely exchanged a word as they walked all that way along the high road, and up the avenue, Paul

following, though they did not see him. In the hall, Janet separated herself from her father.

"It is Lady Markham *I* want to see," she said, with a familiarity and decision which amazed her father, who knew nothing about her previous visit. Janet recognised the footman Charles who had admitted her before. "You know that Lady Markham will see me," she said; "show me to Lady Markham's room, please."

Spears did not understand it, but he looked on with a vague smile. He himself was quite content to wait in the hall until Paul should appear. He was standing there vaguely remarking the things about him when Paul made his appearance. He gave his former friend his hand, but there was little said between them. Paul took him into the library which for the moment was vacant. It seemed to him that it would be easier to answer questions there where already he had often suffered interrogation and censure. And he did not know—he could not divine what Spears was about to say.

"When do you go?" the young man said.

"We have everything settled to sail on the 21st. That is five days from now."

"I fear," said Paul, "it must have been very inconvenient for you coming here. I am sorry, very sorry, you have taken so much trouble. I should have gone to you, but my mind has been in a whirl; the whole thing looks to me like a dream."

"It is a dream that has given some of your friends a great deal of trouble. Take care, my good fellow, another time how you fall into dreams like this. It is best to take a little more trouble at the beginning to know your own mind," he said slowly, tugging at his pocket. "But after all you came to yourself before there was any harm done, Markham. If it had happened in the middle of the ocean, or when we had got to our destination, it would have been still more awkward. As it was, it has been possible to recover your property," said Spears, at last producing a packet out of its receptacle with a certain glow of suppressed disdain in his countenance. He got out a little bag of money as he spoke, and laid it on the table, then produced his pocket-book, which he opened, and took something out.

"What does this mean, Spears?"

"It means what is very simple, Paul—mere A B C

work, as you should know. It is the amount of your subscriptions—what you have contributed in one way or another. I won't trouble you with the items," he said; "they are all on a piece of paper with the bank notes. And now here is the whole affair over," said Spears with the motion of snapping his fingers, "and no harm done. Few young men are able to say as much of their vagaries. Perhaps if you had involved yourself with a higher class, with people more like yourself, it might not have been equally easy to get away."

"But this is impossible! this cannot be!" cried Paul. "I intended nothing of the kind. Spears, you humble me to the dust. You must not—it is not possible that I can accept this. I intended—I made sure——"

"You meant to leave us yourself, but to let your money go as alms to the revolutionaries?" cried Spears, with a thrill of agitation in his voice which seemed to make the room ring. "Yes, I suppose you might have fallen among people who would have permitted it. (The strange thing was that most of the members of the society had been of this opinion, and that it was all that Spears could do to rescue the money which the

others thought lawfully forfeited.) But we are not of that kind. We don't want filthy money with the man away, or even with his heart away."

The orator held his head high; there was a certain scorn about his gestures, about his mouth. He tried to show by a careless smile and air that what he was doing was of no importance, an easy and certain step of which there could be no doubt; but the thrill of excited feeling in him could not be got out of his voice. And Paul, perhaps, had even more excuse for excitement.

"I will not take a farthing of the money," he said.

"Then you will carry it back yourself, my lad. I have washed my hands of it. If you think I will permit a penny of yours to go into our treasury apart from yourself and your sympathy and your help! I would have taken all that and welcome. I have told you already—to little use—what you were to me, Paul Markham. The Bible is right after all about idols, though many is the word I've spoken against it. I made an idol of you, and lo! my image is broken into a thousand pieces. It is like giving the thing a kick the more," he said, with a sudden burst of harsh laughter, "to think when it was all over and ended that

I would take the money! It shows how much you knew me."

"Then it is a mere matter of personal offence and disappointment, Spears?"

"Offence!" he cried. "Yes, offence if you like the word—as it is offence when your friend puts a knife into you. The first thing you feel is surprise. Who could believe it? He! to stab you, when you were leaning upon him. It takes all a man's credulity to believe that. But when it is done—" he added with one of the sudden smiles which used to illuminate his rugged countenance, but now lighted it up with a gleam of angry melancholy, just touched with humour, "you don't take money from him, Paul."

"Nor does he take it from you," said Paul, quickly. "Spears, this is all folly. It is not a matter of passion, as you make it. Say I am as much in the wrong as you like. I did not know my own mind. I have had enough to go through in the last six weeks to teach me many things more important than my own mind. I can't go with you; I have found out that—but what then? I don't lose my interest in you; we don't cease to be friends. As for stabbing you, putting a knife

into you—that is ludicrous," he cried, with an angry laugh. "It is like a couple of lovers in a French novel; not two Englishmen and friends."

"I'll tell you what, Paul," said the other, taking no notice; "if all had been going well with you, why I could have put up with it. A place like this makes a man think. I've told you so before. It's like being a prince on a small scale. Had I been born a prince I might have been a tyrant, but I shouldn't have abandoned my throne; and no more would you, I always thought, if you once felt the charm of it. But when all that was over, Paul, when you had lost everything, come down from your high estate, and felt," cried Spears, with an outburst of vehement feeling, "the burning and the bitterness of disappointment, that you should have abandoned us, and the cause, and me—your friend and father, *then!*"

He turned away, and walked from end to end of the long room. As for Paul, he did not say a word. What could he say? how could he explain that it was precisely then, when he had lost everything, that those strange companions had become most intolerable to him. They were bearable when his choice of them was a folly, and

his own position utterly different from theirs; but as the distance lessened, the breach grew more apparent. This however he could not say. Nor had he a word to answer when Spears called himself his father. What did it mean? and where was Janet, whom he had seen entering the house, but who had disappeared? Paul's thoughts veered away from the chief subject of the interview, while Spears, walking up and down the room, talked on. The money lay on the table, neither taking any further notice of it. It was found there by Gus when he came in an hour after, lying upon the table in the same spot. Gus thought it a temptation to the servants, and threw it into a drawer. He was not used to careless dealing with money, and he looked out very curiously at the strange man who was walking up and down the avenue with Paul, talking much and gesticulating largely. This was a kind of man altogether apart from all Sir Gus's experiences, and his curiosity was much exercised. Was it perhaps an electioneering agent come here to talk of the representation of Farborough, and Sir William's vacant seat? Gus stood at the window and watched, for he had a great deal of curiosity, with very keen eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

ALICE and her mother kept apart for one night. They said good-night to each other hurriedly, the one too much wounded to ask, the other too proud to offer, her confidence. But when they had done this they had reached the length of their respective tethers. Next morning the girl stole into her mother's room before any one was awake, and clinging about her, begged her pardon—for what she did not say. And Lady Markham kissed her and forgave her, though there was nothing to forgive. Words after all are the poorest exponents of meaning; they knew a great deal better what it was than if they had put it into words. And it was not till long after this reunion that Lady Markham said, quite accidentally, "Why did you not tell me Mr. Fairfax's secret, Alice? He seems to be much in earnest about it, poor boy."

Said Alice, very seriously, "How could I speak to you, mamma, about anything so—about anything that I was not obliged to speak of, at such a time?"

"Oh, my dear, that is true, that is most true. But it hurt me a little, for it made me feel as if—you were keeping something from me."

"We all like Mr. Fairfax," said Alice, courageously, "but it does not matter, does it, about his family? He was very good, very kind, at a time when we needed help; but to tell you about his want of a grandfather——"

Feeling safe in the smile which such a want would naturally call forth, Alice (rashly) ventured to meet her mother's eyes. And then to her confusion, the former accident repeated itself, notwithstanding every precaution. It is very difficult indeed to take precautions against such accidents. Once more an exasperating, but unpreventable blush, of doubly died crimson, hot, sudden, scorching, flamed over Alice's face.

Lady Markham saw it, and felt the shock thrill through her again; but she was wise and took no notice. She shook her head. "I am not so sure about that," she said. "It is always of consequence

to know to whom your friends belong. I wish—I wish——"

But what she was going to say—whether to wish for a grandfather to Fairfax, or to wish that she had not opened her house to him, could never be known; for just then Mrs. Martin opened the door with a little impatience and annoyance, and begged to know whether her lady was expecting again the young person who had been at Markham some time ago—a young person who insisted that Lady Markham would be sure to see her, and of whom Mrs. Martin evidently did not at all approve—by name Spears.

Lady Markham cast a hurried glance at Alice. It was her turn now to blush. "You can bring her in," she said. Then a few words were hastily exchanged between the mother and daughter. Alice seized upon some needlework which lay by. Sheltered by that, she drew her seat away towards the window out of her mother's immediate neighbourhood. Janet came in with a free and familiar step. She was elated by the readiness of her reception, the power of once more crowing over the important and dignified Mrs. Martin, and with something else which she was aware enhanced her own

position still more. She came quickly in, and, without any of the timidity and awe of her first appearance, advanced to Lady Markham with outstretched hand, and a countenance covered with smiles; but notwithstanding, with instantaneous quickness noticed Alice, and felt that to be thus made acquainted with Miss Markham added another glory still. Was it not treating her as one of the family? When Janet saw this she determined to sell her consent to become one of the family still more dear.

"How do you do, my lady?" she said. "I thought as father was coming to see Mr. Paul I might just as well come too and see yourlady ship, and speak about —the business that is between you and me."

Here Janet, delighted to feel herself so entirely at home, took a chair and drew it close to the table at which Lady Markham had been seated. She put her umbrella down against the table, and undid the fastening of her mantle.

"We have walked all the way from the station," she said, with engaging ease, "and it was so hot."

Lady Markham did not know what to say; the words were taken out of her mouth. She seated herself also,

humbly, and looked at her visitor, who had made so wonderful an advance in self-confidence since she saw her first.

"Your father—has come with you?" she said.

"He thinks it is me that has come with him, my lady," said Janet. Then she looked pointedly at Alice bending over her work against the window. "I may speak before the young lady? I would not wish what I've got to say to go any further—not out of the family," she said.

"It is my daughter," said Lady Markham. "Alice, this is the daughter of Mr. Spears."

Janet smiled, and bowed her head graciously. She was in a state of great suppressed elation and excitement.

"I don't need to ask," she said, "my lady, if you followed my advice?"

"Your advice?"

"About Sir Paul; it answered very quick, didn't it? I thought that would bring him to his senses. Father is as vexed! he thinks it is all my fault, but I never pretended different. A gentleman that has everything he can set his face to, and a title, and a beautiful

property, why should he emigrate? But now there is something else that I've come to ask you about."

"Do you mean that my son—has given up the idea?" Lady Markham could scarcely articulate the words.

"Oh, yes, bless you, as soon as ever you let him know that it would not make any difference. I knew very well that was what he meant all along. What should he go abroad for, a gentleman with his fortune? it was all nonsense. And Lady Markham," said Janet, solemnly, "it would be mean to leave him in the lurch, I know, after all that; but still, I've got myself to look to. I don't understand what all this story is about a new gentleman, and him, after all, not having anything. I can't feel easy in my mind about it. I like Sir Paul the best, and always will; but I've had another very good offer. It's too serious to play fast and loose with," said Janet, gravely, "it's something as I must take or leave. Now there is nobody but you, my lady, that will tell me the truth. He is Sir Paul, ain't he? he has got the property? I wouldn't take it upon me to ask such questions if it wasn't that I am, so to speak, one of the family. And as for father—I can't put no confidence in what father says."

Alice got up hurriedly from her chair and threw down her work; it was a mere movement of impatience, but to Janet every movement meant something. She kept her eyes upon the young lady who might, for anything she could tell, be in a conspiracy to keep the truth from her.

"Father thinks of nothing but love," she said, following Alice with her eyes, "but there's more in marriage than that. I can't trust in father to tell me true."

"What is it you want me to tell you?" said Lady Markham, trembling with eagerness.

She would have told her—almost anything that was not directly false. She began to frame in her mind a description of Paul's disinheritance, but she feared to spoil her case by too great anxiety. As for Alice, she stood by the window pale, speechless, indignant—too wildly angry on Paul's account to perceive what her mother saw so plainly, that here was a chance of escape for Paul.

"Well, just the truth, my lady," said Janet, "if it is true what folks are saying. I can't believe it's true. You are Lady Markham, I never heard anything against

that, and he is your eldest. But they say he is not Sir Paul and hasn't the property. I can't tell how that can be."

"It is true, though," said Lady Markham, speaking low; even when there was an excellent use for it, it was not easy to repeat all the wrongs that her son had borne. "My son is not Sir Paul," she said, "nor has he the Markham estates. He has an elder brother who has inherited everything. This has only been quite certain for two or three days. My boy—who had every prospect of being rich—is now poor. That is very grievous for him; but to those who love him," said the indiscreet woman, her heart triumphing over her reason, "he is not changed; he is all he ever was, and more."

"Neither the property nor the title?" said Janet, with a blank countenance. "Poor instead of being rich? Oh, it is not a thing to put up with—it is not to be borne! But I can't see how it can be," she cried; "poor instead of rich! If it wasn't for one or two things, I should think it was a plot to disgust me—to separate him and me."

"But," said Lady Markham—she had never perhaps in her life before spoken with the cold energy of a

taunt, with that desperate calm of severity, yet trembling of suspense—"that is in your own hands, Miss Spears. If you love him, no one can separate him from you."

It was all she could do to get out the words; her breath went in the tumult of her heart.

"Oh—love him!" The trouble and disappointment on Janet's face were quite genuine; every line in her countenance fell. "You know as well as I do that's not everything, Lady Markham. You may like a man well enough; but when you were just thinking that all was settled, and everything as you could wish—and to find as he has nothing—not even the Sir to his name! Oh, it's too bad—it's too bad—it's cruel! I would not believe father, and I can hardly believe you."

"It is true, however," Lady Markham said.

She watched the girl with a keenness of contempt, yet a breathless gasp of hope—emotions more intense than she had almost ever known before. She was fighting for her son's deliverance—she who had delivered him into the toils. As for Alice, she stood with her face pressed against the window, and her hands upon her ears. She did not want either to hear or to see.

"Well!" said Janet, with a long breath, too deep for a sigh. "I am glad I came," she added after a moment; "I would never have believed it, never! And I'm sure I am sorry for him—very, very sorry. After giving up the colony for my sake, and all! But I could not be expected to ruin all my prospects, could I, my lady? And me that had set my heart on being Lady Markham like you!" she cried, clasping her hands. This was a bitter reflection to Janet; her eyes filled with tears. "I don't know how I can face him to say 'No' to him," she went on; "he will take it so unkind. But if you consider that I have another offer—a very good offer—plenty of money, and no need for me to trouble my head about anything. That would be different—very different from anybody that married Mr. Paul now."

"Very different, Miss Spears. My son's wife would be a poor woman; she would have to struggle with poverty and care. And it would be all the worse because he is not used to poverty; indeed, he could not marry—he has no money at all. She would have to wait for years and years."

"Oh, it's too bad—it's too bad—it's cruel!" cried Janet once more. Then she relapsed into a grateful

sense of her escape. "But I am very glad I came. I never would have believed it from any one but you. Oh, dear, oh, dear!" cried Janet again, "what a downfall for him, poor young gentleman—and he that was always so proud! I won't say nothing to him, Lady Markham, not to make him feel it more. I will give out that I only came with father, and to see you, and ask you if you will recommend our shop. Now that all this is settled, I may as well tell you that I've almost quite made up my mind to marry Mosheer Lisiere, the new partner at our shop. He is a French gentleman, but he's very well off, and very clever in the business. I think I cannot do better than take him," said Janet, adding with a sigh the emphatic monosyllable, "*now*."

Notwithstanding, however, that this was so comfortably settled, Janet turned round upon Lady Markham, who was going down stairs with her to make sure that Paul had no hankering after this sensible young woman, and to keep the government of the crisis generally in her own hands. Janet turned round upon her as they were going out of the room.

"But he will have your money?" she said.

"His sisters," said Lady Markham, with a little gasp,

for she had not expected this assault, and was not prepared for it—"his sisters," she said "will have my money."

Janet looked at her searchingly, and then, convinced at last, went slowly down stairs. She had lost something. Never more was she likely to have the chance of being my lady—never would she strike awe into the bosoms of the servants who had looked so suspiciously on her by returning as young Lady Markham. On the other hand, there was a satisfaction in being able to see her own way clear before her. She was very thoughtful, but she was not dissatisfied with her morning's work. Supposing she had gone so far as to marry Paul Markham, a gentleman (she used the word now in her thoughts as an expression of contempt) without a penny! Janet shivered at the thought. Instead of that, she would step at once into a good house with a cook and a housemaid, and everything handsome about her. She was very glad that she had come to Lady Markham and insisted on knowing the truth.

As for Lady Markham, she was still quivering with the conflict out of which she had come victorious. But triumph was in her heart. She could afford now to be

magnanimous. "You went away without any refreshment the last time you were here," she said graciously, as she followed her visitor down stairs; "but you must take some luncheon with us to-day, your father and you."

"Oh, thank you, my lady," Janet cried, forgetting her dignity. This of itself almost repaid her for giving up Paul.

Lady Markham did not forget Janet's request to see the house, which had been so boldly made when the girl had thought herself Paul's future wife. She took her into the great drawing-room with a little gleam of malicious pleasure, to show her what she had lost, and watched her bewildered admiration and awe. By this time the happiness of knowing that her son was not going to forsake her had begun to diffuse itself through Lady Markham's being like a heavenly balsam, soothing all her troubles. When they met going into the dining-room as the luncheon-bell rang, she put her hand within his arm, holding it close to her side for one moment of indulgence.

"You are not going away," she said in his ear. "Thank God! Oh, why did you not make me happy sooner—why did you not tell me, Paul?"

"Going away," he said perplexed, "of course I am going away." And then her real meaning crossed him. "What, with Spears?" he said. "There has not been any thought of that for many a day."

Spears talked little at this meal; he was full of the discouragement and mournful anger of disappointment. Up to the last moment he had hoped that Paul would change his mind—perhaps on the ground of his supposed love for Janet, if nothing else. But Paul had said nothing about Janet. He did not understand it, but it made his heart sore. The rest of the party were embarrassed enough, except Gus, who still thought this man with the heavy brows was an electioneering agent yet did not like to tackle him much, lest he should show his own ignorance of English policy—("Decidedly I must read the papers and form opinions," Gus said to himself); and Janet, who, seated at this beautiful table, with the flowers on it and all the sparkling glass and silver, and Charles waiting behind her chair, was sparkling with delight and pride. She was seated by the side of Sir Augustus, and spoke to him, calling him by that name. The dishes which were handed to her by the solemn assiduity of Mr. Brown were food for the gods,

she thought, though they were simple enough. She made notes of everything for her own future guidance. It was just possible, M. Lisiere had said, that he might keep a page to wait upon his wife; thus the glory of a "man-servant" might still be hers. In imagination she framed her life on the model of Markham; and so full was her mind of these thoughts that Janet scarcely noticed Paul, who, on his side, paid no attention to her. As for Lady Markham, she was the soul of the party. She almost forgot her recent sorrow, and the sight of Sir Augustus at the other end of the table did not subdue her as usual. She asked Spears questions about his journey with the very wantonness of relief—that journey which she had shuddered to hear named, which had overshadowed her mind night and day was like a dead lion to her; she could smile at it now.

"Ay, my lady, that's how it's going to end," said Spears. "I don't say that it's the way I could have wished. There was a time when the thought of new soil and a fresh start was like a new life to me. But perhaps it's only because the time is so close, and a crisis has something in it that makes you think. It's a kind of dying, though it's a kind of new living too.

Everything is like that. I suppose—one state ends and the other begins. We don't know what we are going to, but we know what we're giving up. Paul there—you see he has changed his mind. He had a right to change his mind if he liked—I am saying nothing against it. But that's another sort of dying to me."

"Oh, Mr. Spears, do not say so. To me it is new life. Did not I tell you once, if we were in trouble, if we needed him to stand by us (God knows I little thought how soon it would come true!), that my boy would never forsake his family and his position then? Paul might have left us prosperous," said his mother with tears in her eyes, "but he would never leave us in sorrow and trouble. Mr. Spears, I told you so."

And who can doubt that she spoke (and by this time felt) as if her confidence in Paul had never for a moment flagged, but had always been determined and certain as now?

And Spears looked at her with the respect of a generous foe who owned himself vanquished. "And so you did," he said. "I remember it all now. My lady, you knew better—you were wiser than I."

"Oh, not wiser," she said, still magnanimous; "but it

stands to reason that I should know my own boy better than you."

Again he looked at her, respectful, surprised, half convinced; perhaps it was so. After all his pride and sense of power, perhaps it was true that the simplest might know better than he. He let a great sigh escape from his breast, and rose in his abstraction from the table, without waiting for the mistress of the house, which it was usually part of his careful politeness to do.

"We must be going," he said; "our hours are numbered. Good-bye, my Lady Markham; you are a woman that would have been a stronghold to us in my class. I am glad I ever knew one like you; though you will not say the same of me."

"Do not say that, Mr. Spears," said Lady Markham again. It was true she had often been disposed to curse his name; and yet she would have said as he had said—she was glad she had ever known one like him. She put out her hand to him with a genuine impulse of friendship, and did not wince even when it was engulfed and grasped as in a vice by his strong and resolute hand.

"God bless you, my lady," he said, looking at her with a little moisture coming by hard pressure into the corners of his eyes.

"And God bless you too, Mr. Spears—my friend," she said with a hesitation that almost made the words more expressive, and her long eyelashes suddenly grew all bedewed and dewy, and shone with tears. The demagogue wrung the delicate hand of the great lady, and strode away out of the house, paying no attention to the calls of his daughter, who was not quite ready to follow him. Paul rose too, and accompanied them silently down the avenue. Janet talked a little, chiefly to assure her father there was no hurry, and to upbraid him with hurrying her away. At the gate Spears turned round and took Paul by the hands.

"Come no further," he said. "She knew better than I. She said you would never forsake your post, and I don't deny your post is here. I am glad to be convinced of it, lad, for it lets me think well of you, and better than ever. It goes against me to say it, Paul; but if your heart melts to me after I am gone, you may tell yourself Spears was the happier to think it was your

duty that kept you after all. If you should never hear of me again——"

"But I shall hear of you again, and often," cried Paul, with an emotion he had never anticipated, grasping the other's hand.

"God knows," said Spears; "but I'm glad I came. Good-bye."

And again he strode away, leaving Janet to follow, and Paul standing looking after him, with a sudden pang in his heart.

Fairfax was coming along the road very seriously—coming to know his fate too. He paused, surprised, at the sight of the pair. But Spears took little notice of Fairfax. He gave him a grasp of his hand in passing, and said, "Good-bye, my lad," with a clear voice. The young man stopped for a moment to look after them; then went on to where Paul was standing, somewhat dreamily, looking after them too.

"I feel as if I had lost a friend," Paul said, "though he has done me more harm than good, I suppose. He has brought me back my money, Fairfax; he will not take a penny from me; and that will be all the worse for him among those others. What can I do?"

"Leave it to me," said Fairfax—it was a way he had; "and good-bye to an honest soul. I am glad that ugly place in Clerkenwell is not the last place I have seen him in."

Paul's countenance darkened. "I wish you had not reminded me of that," he said.

And they walked up to the house together, saying little more. Fairfax had but little leisure to think of Spears. He was going to his own trial, and he did not know how he was to come out of it. The court had sat upon his case for the last twenty-four hours, and no doubt had come to a final decision. It would have been an important subject indeed which could have done more than touch the edge of his anxious mind. Paul left him in the hall; and Mr. Brown, divining that something more was going on, and having, as has been said, a well-founded and favourable estimate of Fairfax, for reasons of his own, showed him with great solemnity into the sanctuary where Lady Markham sat alone. She did not rise to meet him, but smiled, and held out her left hand to him, with the pretty French fashion of acknowledging intimacy. It was a good sign. He went up very eagerly to

the beautiful, kind woman, in whose hands he felt was his fate.

"You find me quite *emotionnée*," she said, "parting from Mr. Spears. Yes, you may smile—but I was more like crying. I am sure he is a good man, though he may be—led astray."

"He is not led astray," said Fairfax; but then he remembered that it was not his business to plead any cause but his own. He looked at her wistfully, though there was always that under-gleam of humour in his eyes. "I have come up for sentence, Lady Markham," he said.

She smiled. "The sentence will not be very severe; there is not much harm done."

This was far worse than any severity could be. His countenance fell, sudden despondency filled his heart; and now the humour fled altogether from the mournful eyes with which he looked up into his judge's face.

This time Lady Markham almost laughed. "You do not seem pleased to hear it," she said. "I thought it might ease your mind."

"Oh, Lady Markham, do not jeer at me! You may think it does not matter, but to me——"

"It is sport to me, but death to you?" she said; "is that what you would say? No, Mr. Fairfax—no; not so bad as that. And you must pardon me if I am light-minded. I am happy. Paul is not going with those mad people; he is safe; he is free."

"I am very glad," said Fairfax, "but may I say that Paul is irrelevant just now? I have come up for my sentence. Is it to be banishment, or is it——? Ah, Lady Markham, tell me—is there any hope?"

"Mr. Fairfax," she said, with great gravity, "you ask me for leave to get my Alice from me, if you can; and then you tell me you are nobody, of no family, with no connections. Pardon me; my only informant in yourself."

"It is true—quite true."

"Then," she said, and paused, "judge for me, Mr. Fairfax, what can I say?"

He made no reply, and there was an interval of silence, which was very heavy, very painful to Lady Markham's kind heart. She felt compelled to speak, because of that stillness of expectation which made the moment tragical.

"If," she said, faltering, "there had been time

enough for real love to take possession of you—both of you—if it had come to *that*, that you could not be parted, it would be a different matter, Mr. Fairfax; but you have known each other so short a time, the plant cannot have very deep roots. Cannot you be brave, and pluck it up, and bear the wrench? In the end, perhaps, it would be better for you both."

"Better!" he cried, with a bitterness never heard before in his voice.

"Mr. Fairfax, God knows I do not want to be hard upon you. My poor boy, I am fond of you," she said, with a sudden, tender impulse; "but what can I say? A man who tells me he is obscure and humble, and not a match for her—am I to give my Alice up to a struggling, harassed life?"

"There is one thing I forgot to say, Lady Markham. It is of no consequence; it does not affect the question one way or another. Still, perhaps I ought to tell you. It is that I am ridiculously, odiously, abominably——"

"What?" she said, in alarm.

"Rich!" cried the young man. "You know the worst of me now."

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER these events an interval of great quiet occurred at Markham. Paul went to town, where he was understood to be reading for the bar, like most other young men, or preparing for a public office—opinions being divided as to which it was. Naturally Sir William Markham's son found no difficulty in getting any opening into life which the mania of examination permitted. Indeed there were friends of his father's very anxious to get him into parliament, and "push him on" into the higher branches of the public service; but he had not yet sufficiently recovered from the rending and tearing of the past to make this possible. He was inseparable from one of his Oxford comrades, a young fellow whom nobody knew, a young Crœsus, the son of some City man, who had judiciously died and left him,

unencumbered by any vulgar relations, with an immense fortune. It already began to be said by people who saw the young men together, that no doubt Lady Markham would be wise enough to secure this fine fortune for Alice; but at present, of course, in the first blackness of their mourning, nothing could be definitely arranged on this subject. Paul lived in London, at first moodily enough, resenting the great harm that had been done him, but afterwards not so badly on the whole. He had lost a great deal certainly, but not anything that takes the comfort out of actual life. He was as well lodged, and had his wants as comfortably supplied as if he had been Sir Paul Markham. Hard as his reverses had been upon him, they had not plunged him into privations, and indeed it is possible that young Paul in a public office would have as much real enjoyment of his life as any landed baronet or county magnate, perhaps more; but then for Paul, if he wanted to "settle," for Paul married and middle-aged, the case would be very different; unless indeed he married money, which he showed very little inclination to do.

Spears sailed in the end of October with his younger

daughters, Janet having first been married with much solemnity to her master at the shop, who gave her a very gorgeous house, with more gilding about it than any house in the neighbourhood, and dressed her so that she was a sight to see. Her father never pretended to understand the history of the tie which had been formed, he could not tell how, and broken in the same mysterious way. He had a vague consciousness that he ought to have done or said something in the matter, but how was he to do it? And all is well that ends well. Before the emigrants sailed, Fairfax appeared suddenly and renewed his anxious desire to take those shares in the undertaking which Spears had not permitted Paul to retain. Fairfax protested that it was as a speculation he did it, and that nowhere could he find a better way of investing his money. And though Spears was only half deceived, he was at the same time, in spite of himself, elated by this profession of confidence, which restored the *amour-propre* which had been so deeply wounded, and at the same time restored himself, as the controller of so large an amount of capital, to his right place among the adventurers. He would not have accepted a farthing from Paul, but from that easy-going

fellow Fairfax all seemed so natural! Whatever happened *he* would not mind; but there could be little doubt that the estimate thus formed was entirely true.

Thus quiet fell upon Markham with the winter mists and rains. It was not cheerful there in the midst of the wet woods, when the dark weather closed in without any of the hospitalities and wholesome country diversions which make winter bright. Their sorrow and their mourning only began to reign supreme when all the agitation was stilled, and Paul had settled into his strangely-changed existence, and Sir Augustus had become the master of the house. The only variety the family had was in a sudden visit from the Lennys, husband and wife, who had only heard of all that had passed on her return from a round of the cheap places on the Continent, which was their way of living when they had no visits to make. Mrs. Lenny knew, what so few of us know, where these cheap places were, and had eaten funny foreign dinners, and knew how to choose what was the best in them, in many an out-of-the-way corner. They had been in Germany and Switzerland, appearing now and then at a watering-place, as a seal comes to the surface to take breath. And it was not

till nearly Christmas that they heard all that had happened. Mrs. Lenny came and threw herself upon Lady Markham's shoulder and wept. "If I had known, my dear lady, if I had known the trouble that was coming on your dear family through me and mine!" the good woman said. As for Colonel Lenny, he could not speak to Lady Markham, but went off with the boys, who were at home for the holidays, after one silent grasp of her hand; but his wife talked and cried, and cried and talked all the afternoon through.

"And don't blame poor Will Markham more than you can help," she said. "It was a baby when he left the island, and what does a young man think of a baby? It doesn't seem to count at all. And then my brother had adopted the little thing. It didn't seem as if it belonged to him."

This appeal to her on behalf of her own husband, wounded Lady Markham almost as much as blame.

"I understand how it was," she replied with proud stoicism; though even at that moment, in hearing him thus defended, there glanced across Lady Markham's mind a sense of the wrong he had done which was almost intolerable to her. Thus the mind works by

contradiction, seeing most distinctly that which it is called upon not to see. Afterwards, Mrs. Lenny told her the whole story of Gus's young mother, and her love and death, which she listened to with a strange feeling that she herself was the girl who was being talked of, who had died so young.

"He was no better than a lad himself," Mrs. Lenny said. "I don't doubt that it was like a dream to him. When Lenny and I talked to him first he did not seem to understand about the boy."

"You talked to him then—about—his son?"

"That was what we came for, surely," said Mrs. Lenny, "that was what we came for. We knew nothing about you, my dear lady, and we didn't know there was a family. When I heard of your fine young gentleman that was to be the heir,—God bless him!—you might have knocked me down with a straw; and I told Will he should make a clean breast of it. But do you think a man, and a great statesman, would take a woman's advice? They think they know better, and he would not. He thought nothing would ever happen, poor Will! And here it's come upon you like a tempest, without a word of warning."

"We will say no more about it," said Lady Markham.

If she could she would have obliterated the story from everybody's memory; instead of dwelling upon her wrongs it was her pride to ignore them. It was intolerable to her to think that all the world of her acquaintance must have discussed her and her husband, and all that had happened, as Mrs. Lenny, with the best of intentions and the kindest of thoughts, was doing. She put a stop to the conversation pointedly, leading her companion to other subjects, and though she was more kind to them than ever, and treated those kind and innocent Bohemians as if, Mrs. Lenny said, they had been the governor and his lady, she did not encourage any return to this subject. As for Gus, though he had scarcely any recollection of them, he was very glad to see these relations, who knew so much more about him than any of his family did. Colonel Lenny was a god-send to him in the dark winter days. He could hardly make up his mind to let them go. But the Lennys were too much accustomed to wandering, and too determined, whatever might be wanting to them, that a little amusement never should be wanting, to relish the gloom of Markham in its mourning. When they went

away, Mrs. Lenny whispered a solemn intimation, of which it was difficult to say whether it was a warning or a prophecy, into Lady Markham's ear. "He'll not stand it long," she said. Her note was half melancholy, half congratulatory, and she nodded and shook her head alternately, looking back as the carriage went down the avenue upon the group at the great door. Lady Markham, with a shawl round her, was as fair in her matronly beauty as ever, though a little paler than of old. She was not afraid of the chill, but stood there waving her hand to her departing guests till they were out of sight. But Sir Gus withdrew shivering to his fire, which roared up the chimney night and day, and could never be made big enough to please him. He could not understand what pleasure it could be to any one to encounter that chill air, laden with moisture, out of doors.

The fact was that the English winter was a terrible experience for Sir Gus. He had not contemplated anything so unlike all that he had previously known. He had heard of it, of course, and knew that there was cold to encounter such as he had never felt before, but he was not aware what were the consequences of that

cold, either mental or bodily. He shrank visibly in the midst of his wrappings, and grew leaner and browner as the year went on, and sat shivering close by his great fire when the boys came in glowing with exercise, and the little girls, his favourites, with brilliant roses of winter on their cheeks. "Come out, come out, and you will get warm!" they all cried; but he would not leave his fire. A man more out of place in an English country-house in a severe winter could not be. Gus could do nothing that the other gentlemen did. He neither hunted nor shot, nor even walked or rode. He did not understand English law or customs, to occupy himself with the duties of a magistrate; he did not care about farming; he knew nothing about the preserving of the game, or even the care of the woods. He was fretful when the agent or his clerk came to consult him on any of these subjects. Go out and look at the timber! he only wanted more to burn, to have better and better fires.

By this time the family at Markham had almost begun to forget that Gus was an intruder. There was no more question of Lady Markham's removal to the dower-house. Nothing had been said about it by one

or the other, but it had been quietly, practically laid aside, as a visionary scheme impossible in the circumstances. They all lived together calmly, monotonously, in perfect family understanding. Even Alice, who stood out so long against him, had learned to accept Gus. The little girls made him their slave; he was always ready to do anything they wanted, to take them wherever they pleased. But life got to be very heavy upon Gus's hands as these winter days went on. He had nothing to do; he did not even read—that resource of the unoccupied; he had no letters to write, or business to do like his father, and he soon began to hate the library which had been appropriated to him, notwithstanding its huge fireplace. He was more at home in the soft brightness of the drawing-room, with velvet curtains drawn round him, and the lights reflected in the mirrors and sparkling on the pretty china and ornaments. The ladies found him in their territories more than in his own. He interrupted nothing, but notwithstanding, there, as everywhere, there was nothing for him to do. It was only now and then, not once a day at the most, that there was a skein of silk or of wool to hold for some one. Sometimes he would

volunteer to read aloud, but he soon tired of that. He bore this want of occupation very well on the whole, sitting buried in the big bamboo chair, which he had filled with soft cushions, at the corner of the fire in the drawing-room, looking on at all that was doing, and more interested in the needlework than those who worked at it. Poor little gentleman! Sir Gus did not even care for the newspapers; he looked at the little paragraphs of general interest, but turned with a grimace from the long reports of the debates. "What good does all that do me?" he said, when Lady Markham, who was somewhat horrified by his indifference, endeavoured to rouse him to a sense of his duties.

"But it concerns the country," she would say, "and few people have a greater stake in the country."

"That is how Paul would have felt," said Sir Gus; "he would have read all these speeches; he would have understood everything that is said. It would have mattered to him——"

"Indeed it matters to us all," said Lady Markham, with grave dignity. Of all people in the world to listen while a parliamentary debate is talked of with contempt, the wife of a man who was once a Cabinet

minister is the last—and all the more if her husband held but a secondary place. She was half-offended and half-shocked; but Sir Gus could not see the error of his ways. He got all the picture-papers, which he enjoyed along with Bell and Marie, and sent to the boys after, when they were at school. He cared nothing about the game, except to eat it when it was set before him. From morn to chilly eve he would sit by that fire, and note everything that happened. Not a letter arrived but he was there to see how it was received, and what was in it. Lady Markham declared that had she heard anywhere else, or read in a book, of a man who was always in the drawing-room, who had no duties of his own, and who sat and watched everything, the situation would have seemed intolerable. But it was not so intolerable in reality. They got used, at last, to the big bamboo chair and its inhabitant; they got used to his comments. There was no harm in Mr. Gus; but life was hard upon him. Everybody else was doing something—even the little girls in the school-room were learning their lessons—but he, burying himself in the cushions of his chair, showing nothing out of it but two little brown hands, twirling a paper-knife, or a

pencil, or anything else he had got hold of, had nothing to do. Sometimes he would get up and walk to the window. When it was fine it would give him much pleasure to watch the birds collecting about the bread-crumbs, which he insisted on scattering everywhere.

"There is a lazy one, like me," he would say; and a little pert robin redbreast, a sort of little almoner, who came and superintended the giving away of these charities, gave Sir Gus the greatest amusement. But the people who came to call were not equally amusing. When a man came, he expected Sir Gus to take an interest in the debates, or in the places where the hounds met, and stared, when he knew that Gus, like Gallio, cared for none of these things. And he was not even interested in the parish. When Dolly Stainforth brought up a report of some village catastrophe, Sir Gus was not the one who responded with the greatest liberality. He was not used to have very much money to spare, and he was careful of it. It was not that he loved money, but he had not the habit of spending it lavishly, as we foolish people have. Sometimes he would drive out in a close carriage, to the great contempt of everybody concerned.

"The new master, he *be* a muff," the people in the porter's lodge said. Even from that mild exercise, however, he was glad to come in, shivering, and call Brown to put on a great many more coals in the fire. The house was full of schemes for warming it more effectually. Hot water, hot air—all kinds of expedients; and never had so much fuel been used in Markham in the memory of man.

"He will ruin my lady in coals," Brown said; but Sir Gus did not take this into consideration. It was about the greatest pleasure he had in the good fortune which was to make him so happy.

In February there came, as there sometimes comes, a spell of bright weather—a few soft, spring-like days —and the poor little gentleman from the tropics brightened along with the crocuses. "It is over at last," he said, in beatific self-delusion; and he was persuaded to pay a visit to town when Parliament was on the point of meeting, and the general tuning up for the great concert of the season had begun to begin. Here Sir Gus was confided to the charge of Fairfax, who took him into his own house, and roasted him over huge fires, and made little dinners for him, collecting

other tropical persons to meet him. But very soon Sir Gus found out that it was not over. He found out that not to be interested in the debates, nor in society, nor in books and pictures, and, above all, not to "know people," were sad drawbacks to life in London. He sat dumb while his companions talked of meeting So-and-so at Lord What-d'ye-call-'em's, and of the too-well-known intimacy—"Don't you know?"—between Sir Robert and Lady John. He stared at the talkers, the poor little foreigner! and tired even of Fairfax's big fires. The skies that hang so low over the London streets, the rain and muddy ways, or the east wind that parched them into whiteness, made his very soul shrink. That was not at all a successful experiment. He went back on Lady Markham's hands in March, having ensconced himself now in a coat lined with sables, which buried him still more completely than the big chair.

"England is a very fine place," he said, with his teeth chattering, as he came in, out of a boisterous March wind, which carried upon it bushels of that dust that is worth a king's ransom. "It is a very fine place but—only I don't seem to agree with it." But that

summer must certainly come some time—and spring was certainly come at this period, though Gus did not recognise that pleasant season in its English garb—they must all have given in altogether. But when the primroses appeared in the woods Sir Gus began to get back a little of his courage. Fortunately the summer opened brightly, promising to be as warm and genial as the winter had been severe; and by degrees the little gentleman let his fires go down, and left off his furs. Who can doubt that the winter had been very long at Markham for the whole household? They were living alone in their mourning, and Paul, though only in London, was separated from them, and in a state of great uncertainty and doubtful comfort. And other visitors were banished too. But when the spring came back the household awoke, and broke the bonds of gloom. Even Lady Markham began to smile naturally upon her children—not with the smile of duty put on for their advantage, but with a little natural rising of the clouds. And Alice brightened insensibly, knowing that "they" were to come for Easter; that is, Paul and "one of his friends." Nothing had been said to Alice upon any subject that was likely to agitate

her prematurely, but it was pleasant to look forward to that visit from Paul and his friend—from which fact it may be divined that Lady Markham had been not unfavourably moved by the last item in Fairfax's confession.

Thus summer came again, communicating brightness; and Sir Gus began to live again, and to believe that it might be possible to put up with England after all.

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT summer was as bright as the winter had been cold. The hot weather came on in May, and the country about Markham brightened into a perfect paradise of foliage and blossom. Sir Gus came to life; he began to show himself in the country, to move about, to accept the invitations which were given to him. And it cannot be denied that his thoughts and plans were much modified after he had made acquaintance with the county and began to feel that people were inclined to pay him a great deal of attention. He had wanted nothing better at first than to be received as a member of Lady Markham's family, to adopt, as it were, his brothers and sisters, and to make them as little conscious as possible of the change he had brought into their life. He had promised that he would

never marry, nor do anything to spoil Paul's prospects further. But before the summer was over his views in this respect had sensibly modified. He began to think that perhaps the length and dreariness of the winter had been partly owing to the fact that Lady Markham and her children were less satisfactory than a wife and children of his own. Why should he (after all) sacrifice himself to serve Paul? He was not old, whatever those arrogant young people might think; and probably it was in this way that happiness might come to him. Paul would no doubt get on very well in society; he would marry well, and his younger son's portion was not contemptible; there really seemed no reason why his elder brother should sacrifice himself on Paul's account. And gradually there dawned upon him an idea that before winter came on again he might have some one belonging to him who should be his very own.

Gus dined out very solemnly by himself, making acquaintance with his neighbours during the Easter recess, and when the great people of the neighbourhood came back to the country after the season; and did not scorn the tables of the less great who remained in th country all the year round. He was not exclusive.

The less great houses were still great enough for Gus. He liked to go to the Rectory, where Mr. Stainforth, who was a politic old man, often invited him; and indeed, Sir Augustus, who everybody said was so exceedingly simple and unpretentious, became quite popular in the district where at first everybody had been against him as an intruder. Though it was no less hard upon Paul than before, the new heir was pardoned in the county because of his adoption of the family and his kindness and genuine humility. There could not be any harm in him, people said, when he was so good to the children, when he sought so persistently the friendship of his stepmother, and endeavoured to make everything pleasant for her.

Then it became very evident that Sir Gus, though not so young as he once was, was still marriageable and likely to marry, which naturally still further increased his popularity; and as, instead of attempting any stratagems of self-defence, he was but too eager to put himself into the society of young ladies, and showed unequivocal signs of regarding them with the eye of a purchaser, it was natural that the elder ladies should accept this challenge, and on their parts do what they

could to make him acquainted with the stores the county possessed. Women do not give themselves to this business of settling marriages in England with the candour and honesty that prevail in other countries. The work is stealthy and unacknowledged, but it is too natural and too just not to be done with more or less vigour; and the county was not less active than other counties. "Poor Paul!" some people said, who had at first received the new baronet as a merely temporary holder of the title and estates—one who, according to a legend dear to the popular mind, had bound himself not to do anything towards the achievement of an heir; but by and by they said, "Poor Sir Gus!" and could see no reason in the world why he should sacrifice himself. This was a little after the time when he had himself come to the same conclusion.

When all the families began to return at the end of July, he was asked everywhere. Mourning is not for a man a very rigid bond, and it was now nearly a year since Sir William died, so that there was nothing to restrain him; indeed there were some who said that Lady Markham was too punctilious in keeping Alice at

home, never letting her be seen anywhere—a girl who really *ought* to marry, now that the family were in so changed a position. Sir Gus went a great deal to Westland Towers, where there had never been so many parties before—garden parties, archery meetings, competitions at lawn-tennis, to which the entire county was convoked; and at all these parties there was no more favoured guest than Gus. This was a great change, and pleased him much. At "home" he was not much more than put up with. They had come to like him, and they had always been very kind to him; but he had been an intruder, and he had banished the son of the house, and it was not to be supposed that mortal forbearance should go so far as to admire and honour him as the chief person in the household, even though he was its nominal head. When he went elsewhere Gus was made more of than at Markham, and at the Towers he felt the full force of his own position. His sayings were listened for, his jokes were laughed at, and he himself was followed by judicious flattery. All his little eccentricities were allowed and approved, his light clothes extolled as the most convenient garments in the world, and his distaste for sport and

the winter amusements of country life sanctioned and approved.

"How men of refined habits can do it has always been a mystery to me," said Lady Westland.

"You forget, mamma, that a taste for bloodshed is one of the most refined tastes in the world," said Ada, who was herself fond of hunting when she had a chance, and never was better pleased than when she could lunch with a shooting party at the cover-side. Ada made a grimace behind Gus's back, and said "Little monster!" to the other young ladies.

"Ah, poor Paul! We used to see so much of him," she said, "when he was the man, poor fellow, and no one had ever heard of this little Creole. But parents are nothing if not prudent," Miss Westland added; "and now the tropics are in the ascendant, and poor Paul is nowhere. What can one do?" she said with a shrug of her shoulders up to her ears.

Dolly Stainforth, who was of the party, but not old enough or important enough to say anything, grew pale with righteous indignation. She was very well aware that Paul had never "seen much" of the family at Westland Towers: but that they should now pretend to

hold him at arm's length stung her to the heart. This took place at a garden party, and the explanation about Paul had been made in the midst of a great many people of the neighbourhood, who had all been very sorry for Paul in their day, yet were all beginning now to turn towards the new-risen sun. Dolly had turned her back upon them, and gone off by herself in bitterly-suppressed indignation, sore and wounded, though not for her own sake, when she encountered Sir Gus, who had spied her in a turning of the shrubbery. George Westland had spied her too, but had been stopped by his mother on his way to her, and might be seen in the distance standing gloomily on the outskirts of a group of notables, with whom he was supposed to be ingratiating himself, gazing towards the *bosquet* in which the object of his affections had disappeared.

"What is the matter, Miss Dolly?" Sir Gus had said.

"Oh, nothing. I was not crying," Dolly said, with a sob. "I am too indignant to cry. It is the horridness of people," she cried with an outburst of wrath and grief. Sir Gus was distressed. He did not like to see any one cry, much less this dainty little creature, who was almost his first acquaintance in the place.

"Don't," he said, touching her shoulder lightly with his brown hand. "Whatever it is it cannot be worth crying about. None of them can do any harm to you."

"Harm to *me!* I wish they could," said Dolly; "that would not matter much. But don't believe them, don't you believe them: a little while ago they were all for Paul—nobody was so nice as Paul—and now it is all you, and Paul, they say, is nowhere. Do you think it is like a lady to say that poor Paul is 'nowhere,' only because he has lost his property, and you have got it?" cried Dolly, turning with fury, which it was difficult to restrain, upon the poor little baronet. He changed colour: of course he knew that it was his position, and not any special gifts of his own, which recommended him; yet he did not like the thought.

"That is not my fault, Miss Dolly," he said. "You should not be unjust; though it is your favourite who has been the loser, you ought not to be unjust, for I have nothing more than what is my right."

"Oh, Sir Augustus," said Dolly, alarmed by her own vehemence, "it was not you I meant. You have always been kind. It was those horrid people who

think of nothing but who has the money. And then, you know," she said, turning her tearful eyes upon him, "I have known them all my life—and I can't bear to hear them speak so of Paul."

"And you can't bear me, I suppose, for putting this Paul of yours out of his place?" Gus said.

"No, indeed I don't blame you. A woman might have given it up, but it is not your fault if you are different from a woman—all men are," said Dolly, shaking her head. "When one knows as much about a village as I do, one soon finds out that."

"I suppose you think the women are better than the men," said Sir Gus, shaking his head too.

"I am for my own side," said Dolly promptly, her tears drying up in the impulse of war; "but I did not mean that," she added, "only different. Men and women are not good—or nasty—in the same way. I don't suppose—you—could have done anything but what you did."

"I don't think I could," said Sir Gus, briefly.

"But the people here," said Dolly, "oh, the people here!" She stamped her foot upon the ground in her impatience and indignation; but when he would have

pursued the subject, Dolly became prudent, and stopped short. She would say nothing more, except another appeal to heaven and earth against "the horridness of people." This, however, gave Sir Gus a great deal to think of. Dolly did not in the least know what he had in his mind. She was not aware that the little man was going about among all the pretty groups of the garden party in the conscious exercise of choice, noting all the ladies, selecting the one that pleased him. Two or three had pleased him more or less—but one most of all: which was what Dolly Stainforth never suspected. Sir Gus walked about with the air of a man occupied with important business. He had no time to pay any attention to the progress of the games that were going on; his own affairs engrossed him altogether. Sometimes he selected one lady from a number on pretence of showing her something, or of watching a game, or hearing the band play a particular air, and carried her off with him to the suggested object, talking much and earnestly. He did not pay much court to the mothers and chaperons, but went boldly to the fountain-head. And some of the pretty young women to whom he talked so gravely did not quite know what to make of

the little baronet. They laughed among themselves, and asked each other, "Did he ask you whether you liked town better or country? and if you would not like to take a voyage to the tropics?" Dolly on being asked this question quite early in their acquaintance, had answered frankly, "Not at all," and had further explained that life out of the parish was incomprehensible to her. "I could not leave my poor people for months and months, with nobody but papa to look after them," Dolly had said.

It was only after he had enjoyed about half a dozen interviews of this kind, amusing the greater part of his temporary companions, but fluttering the bosoms of one or two who were quick-witted enough to see the handkerchief trembling in the little sultan's hand, that Sir Gus allowed himself to be carried off in his turn by Ada Westland, who came up to him in her bold way, neglecting all decorum.

"Come with me, Sir Augustus," she said, "I have got a view to show you," and she led him to where among the trees, there was a glimpse of the beautiful rich country, undulating, all wooded and rich with cornfields, to where Markham Chase, with all its oaks and

beeches, shut in the horizon line. There was a glimpse of the house to be had in the distance, peeping from the foliage: and in the centre of the scene, the red roofs of the village and the slope of the Rectory garden in the sunshine. "I used to be brought here often to have my duty taught me," said Ada. "Mamma made quite a point of it every day when we first came here."

"I am glad your duty makes you look at my house, Miss Westland," said Sir Gus, making her a bow.

"Oh, I don't mean now," said the outspoken young woman. "That is quite a different matter. I was quite young then, you know, and so was Paul, and my mother trained me up in the way that a girl should go. We are new people, you know; we have not much distinction in the way of family. What mamma intended to do with me was to make me marry Paul."

Once more Sir Augustus bowed his head quite gravely. He did not laugh at the bold announcement, as she meant he should. "Was your heart in it?" he said.

"My heart? Do you think I have got one? I don't know—I don't think it was, Sir Augustus. 'Look at all that sweep of country,' mamma used to say; 'that may all be yours if you play your cards well—and a

family going back to the Conqueror.' There have only been two generations of *us*," said Ada; "you may think how grand it would have felt to know that there was a Crusader's monument in the family. In some moods of my mind, especially when I have been very much sat upon by the blue-blooded people, I don't think I should have minded marrying the Crusader himself."

"I can understand the feeling," said Gus. He was perfectly grave, his muscles did not relax a hairsbreadth. He stood and looked upon the woods that were his own, and the house which he called home. It looked a little chilly to him, even in the midst of the sunshine. The sky was pale with heat, and all the colours of the country subdued in the brilliant afternoon light, the trees hanging together like terrestrial clouds, the stubble-fields grey where the corn had been already cut, and the roads white with dust. But it did not occur to him as he stood and gazed at Markham that it would make him happy to live there with his present companion by his side. "Beauty is deceitful, and favour is vain." She was one of the prettiest persons present. She was full of wit and cleverness, and had far more wit and knowledge than half of her party put together. But

the heart of the little baronet was not gained by those qualities. He stood puite unmoved by Ada's side. She might have married the Crusader for anything Sir Augustus cared. Ada waited a little to see if no better reply would come, and then she made another *coup*.

"Pity us for an unfortunate family, foiled on every side," she said. "Paul you know, has ceased to be a *parti* altogether. Anybody may marry him who pleases—and to a district in which men do not abound this is a great grievance—but I don't blame you for that, Sir Augustus, though some do. And look there," she said, suddenly turning round, "look at the door of the conservatory. There are mamma's hopes tumbling down in another direction. I don't feel the disappointment so much in my own case, but about George, I do really pity mamma. She can't marry me to the next property, as she intended; and just look at George, making a fool of himself with the parson's daughter. Now, Sir Augustus, don't you feel sorry for mamma?"

"Miss Stainforth is a very charming young lady," said Sir Gus, still as grave as ever, "but I thought that she——" here he stopped in some confusion, having nearly committed himself, he felt.

"I know what you were going to say," said Ada, with a laugh. "You think she had a fancy for Paul too. She might just as well have had a fancy for the moon. The Markhams would never have permitted that; and as for Paul himself, he thought no more of Dolly——! Fancy, Dolly! but my brother does. It is a pity, a great pity, don't you think, that brothers and sisters can't change places sometimes? George would have made a much better young lady than I do. I am much too outspoken and candid for a girl, but I should never have fallen in love with Dolly Stainforth. If mamma could change us now, it would be some consolation to her still."

"Miss Stainforth is a very charming young lady," Sir Gus said again.

"A—ah!" said Ada, with a malicious laugh, "you admire Dolly too, Sir Augustus? I beg a thousand pardons. I ought to have been more cautious. But I never thought that a man who had seen the world, a man of judgment, a person with experience and discrimination——"

"You think too favourably of me," said Sir Gus. "It is true I have come over a great part of the world;

but I don't know that of itself that gives one much experience. You think too favourably of me."

"That is a fault," said Ada, "which most men pardon very easily," and she looked at him in a way that was flattering, Gus felt, but a little alarming too.

This conversation too had its effect upon him. He felt that there was no time to lose in making up his mind. If he was to secure for himself a companion before the winter came on, it would be well not to lose any time. And Miss Westland was very flattering and agreeable; she seemed to have a very high opinion of him. Gus did not feel that she was the woman he would like to marry; but if by any chance it might happen that she was a woman who would like to marry him, he did not feel that she would be very easy to resist. That such a woman might possibly wish to marry him was of itself very flattering; still on the whole, Gus felt that he would prefer to choose rather than to be chosen. And with a shrewd sense of the difficulties of his position, he decided that to have another young lady betrothed to him would be by far his best safeguard against Ada. A woman who belonged

to him would stand up for him; and the mere fact that he belonged to her would be an effectual defence. As it happened, fortune favoured him. Mrs. Booth, who had come with Dolly in her little carriage to the Towers, wanted to get back early, as the evening was so fine, and Dolly declared that there was nothing she would like so much as to walk. There would certainly be somebody going her way to bear her company. Then Sir Gus stepped forward and said he would certainly be going her way, and would walk with her to the Rectory gate. Dolly smiled upon him so gratefully when he said this that his heart stirred in Gus's bosom. She kept near him all the rest of the time, coming up to him now and then to see if he was ready, if he wished to go, with much filial attention; but Gus did not think of it in that light. Nor did he think that it was by way of getting rid of George Westland that she devoted herself to him. This is not an idea which naturally suggests itself to a man who has never had any reason to think badly of himself. Gus had always, on the contrary, entertained a very good opinion of himself; he had known that, on the whole, he deserved that mankind in general should entertain a good opinion of him, and

there was nothing at all out of the way, or even unexpected in the fact that Dolly should be pleased by his care of her, and attracted towards himself. It was a thing which was very natural and delightful, and pleased him greatly. When the company began to disperse, he was quite ready to obey Dolly's indication of a wish to go, and to take leave of Lady Westland when her son was out of the way, according to the girl's desire. They set out upon the dusty road together in the grateful cool of the summer evening, carriage after carriage rolling past them, with many nods and wreathed smiles from the occupants, and no doubt many remarks also upon Dolly's cavalier. But the pair themselves took it very tranquilly. They went slowly along, lingering on the grassy margin of the road to escape the dust, and enjoying the coolness and the quiet.

"How sweet it is," Dolly said, "after the heat of the day."

"You call that hot, Miss Dolly?" said Gus. "We should not call it hot where I come from."

"Well, I am glad I have nothing to do with the tropics," Dolly said. "I like the cool evening better than the day. One can move now—one can walk; but

I suppose you never can do anything there in the heat of the day?"

"I am sorry you don't like the tropics," he said. "I think you would, though, if you had ever been there. It is more natural than England. Yes, you laugh, but I know what I mean. I should like to show you the bright-coloured flowers, and the birds, and all the things so full of colour—there's no colour here. I tell Bell and Marie so, and they tell me it is I that can't see. And then the winter——" Gus shuddered as he spoke.

"But you ought to have gone out more," said Dolly, "and taken exercise; that makes the blood run in your veins. Oh, I like the winter! We have not had any skating here for years. It has been so mild. I like a good sharp frost, and no wind, and a real frosty sun, and the ice bearing. You don't know how delightful it is."

"No, indeed," said Gus, with a shudder. "But, perhaps," he added, "if one had a bright little companion like you, one might be tempted to move about more. Bell and Marie are delightful children, but they are a little too young, you know."

"But Alice——" said Dolly, with a little anxiety.

"Alice never has quite forgiven me, I fear; and then she has her mother to think of; and they always tell me she cannot do this or that for her mourning. It is very right to wear mourning, I don't doubt," said Gus, "but never to be able to go out, or meet your fellow-creatures——"

"That would be *impossible!*" said Dolly, with decision. "It is not a year yet. *You* did not know poor Sir William. But next winter it will be different, and we must all try to do our best"—for Lady Markham, she was going to say—but he interrupted her.

"That will be very kind, Miss Dolly. I think you could do a great deal without trying very much. I always feel more cheerful in your company. Do you remember the first time we ever were in each other's company, on the railway?"

"Oh, yes," cried Dolly. She was very incautious. "I thought you were such a——" She did not *say* queer little man, but felt as if she had said it, so near was it to her lips; and blushed, which pleased Gus greatly, and made him imagine a much more flattering conclusion. "You asked me a great deal about poor

Paul," she said, "and then we met them coming home; and Sir William, oh! how ill he looked—as if he would die!"

"You remember that day?" said Gus, much delighted, "and so do I. You told me a great deal about my family. It was strange to talk of my family as if I had been a stranger, and to hear so much about them."

"I thought you were a stranger, Sir Augustus."

"Yes, and you wished I had been one when you found out who I really was. Oh, I don't blame you, Miss Dolly—it was very natural; but I hope now, my dear," he said, with a tone that was quite fatherly, though he did not intend it to be so, "that you are not so sorry, but rather glad on the whole to know Gus Markham, who is not so bad as you thought."

Dolly was surprised to be called "my dear;" but at his age was it not quite natural?

"Oh," she said, faltering, "I never thought you were bad, Sir Augustus; you have always been very kind, I know."

But she could not say she was glad of his existence, which had done so much harm to—other people; even

though in her heart she had a liking for Sir Gus, the queerest little man that ever was!

"I have tried to be," he said; "and I think they all feel I have done my best to show myself a real friend; but there comes a time when one wants something more than a friend, and, Dolly, I think that time has come now."

Well! it was a little odd, but she did not at all mind being called Dolly by Sir Gus. She looked at him with a little surprise, doubtful what he could mean. They were by this time quite near the village and the Rectory gate.

"I think," he said, "that if I don't get married, my dear, I shall never be able to stand another winter at Markham. It nearly killed me last year."

"Married!" she cried, her voice going off in a high quaver of surprise and consternation. If her father had intimated a similar intention she could scarcely have been more astonished. This is what everybody had consoled themselves by thinking such a man was never likely to do.

"Yes, married," he said. "Don't you think you know, Dolly, a dear little girl that would marry me,

though I am not so young nor so handsome as Paul? You see it is not Paul now, it is me; and though he was handsomer and taller, I don't think he was nearly so good-tempered as I am, my dear. I give very little trouble, and I should always be willing to do what my wife wanted to do—or at least almost always, Dolly—and you would not get that with many other men. Haven't you ever thought of it before? Oh, I have, often. I went through all the others to-day, just to give myself a last chance, to see if, at the last moment, there was any one I liked better; but there was none so nice as you. You see, I have not done it without thought. Now, my pretty Dolly, my little dear, just say you will marry me before the winter, and to-morrow we can settle all the rest."

He had taken her hand as they stood together at the gate. Dolly's amazement knew no bounds. She was so bewildered that she could only stand and gaze at him with open mouth.

"Do you mean me?" she cried at last—"me?" with mingled horror and surprise. "I don't know what you mean!" she said.

"Yes, my dear, I mean you. I tell you I looked

again at all the rest, and there was not one so nice. Of course I mean you, Dolly. I have always been fond of you from the first. I will make you a good husband, dear, and you will make me a sweet little wife."

"Oh, no, no, no!" Dolly cried. The world, and the sky, and the trees, seemed to be going round with her. She caught at the gate to support herself. "No, no, no! It is all a dreadful mistake."

"It cannot be a mistake. I know very well what I am doing, Dolly."

"But oh dear! oh dear! Sir Augustus, let me speak. Do you think I know what *I* am doing? No, no, no, *no!* You must be going out of your senses to ask me."

"Why? because you are so young and so little? But that is just what I like. You are the prettiest of all the girls. You are a dear, sweet, good little thing that will never disappoint me. No, no, it is no mistake."

To see him standing there beaming and smiling through the dusk was a terrible business for Dolly.

"It *is* a mistake. I cannot, cannot do it—indeed I

cannot. I will not marry you—never! I don't want to marry anybody," she said, beginning to weep in her excitement.

Now and then a villager would lumber by, and, seeing the couple at the porch, grin to himself and think that Miss Dolly was just the same as the other lasses. It was a pity the gentleman was so little, was all they said.

CHAPTER XIV.

At last the year of the mourning was over. The Lennys, the good colonel and his wife, had come to Markham a few days before, and he was a great godsend to the boys, who were vaguely impressed by the anniversary, but could not but feel the grief a little tedious which had lasted a whole year. They were very glad to go out quite early in the morning with the colonel, not at all, as it were, for their own pleasure, but because his visit was to be short, and the keeper was in despair about the birds which no one shot, and which Sir Augustus was so utterly indifferent about.

"He wouldn't mind a bit if the place was given up to the poachers," Harry said. "He says, 'What's the good of the game—can't we buy all we want?' I think he is cracked on that point."

"I don't mind Gus at all in some things," said Roland. "He's not half a bad fellow in some things; but he's an awful muff—no one can deny that."

"He has not been brought up as you have been," the colonel said.

While they stole out in the early morning, the old man and the boys, all keen with anticipated pleasure, Gus felt already the first *frisson* of approaching winter in the sunny haze of September, and had coverings heaped upon him, and dressed by the fire when he got up two hours after. Poor Sir Gus was not at all cheerful. Dolly's refusal had not indeed broken his heart, but it had disappointed him very much, and he did not know what he was to do to make life tolerable now that this expedient had failed. The anniversary oppressed him more or less, not with grief, but with a sense that, after all, the huge change and advancement that had come to him with his father's death had not perhaps brought all he expected it to bring. To be Sir Augustus, and have a fine property and more money than he knew how to spend, and a grand position, had not increased his happiness. On the contrary, it seemed to him that the first day he had come to Markham, when the children

had given him luncheon and showed so much curiosity about him as a relation, had been happier than any he had known since. He too had been full of lively curiosity and expectation, and had believed himself on the verge of a very happy change in his life. But he did not anticipate the death or the trouble to others which were the melancholy gates by which he had to enter upon his higher life. When he had dressed, he sat over the fire thinking of it on that bright September morning. He was half angry because he could not get rid of the feeling of the anniversary. After all, there was nothing more sad in the fifteenth of September than in any other day. But Lady Markham, no doubt, would shut herself up, and Alice look at him as if, somehow or other, he was the cause of it; and they would speak in subdued tones, and it would be a kind of sin to do or say anything amusing. Gus could not but feel a little irritation thinking of the long day before him, and then of the long winter that was coming. And all the prophets said it was to be a hard winter. The holly-trees in the park, where they grew very tall, were already crimson with berries. Already one or two nights' frost had made the geraniums droop.

A hard winter! The last had been said to be a mild one. If this was worse than that, Sir Gus did not know what he should do.

The day, however, passed over more easily than he thought. His aunt, Mrs. Lenny, was a godsend to him as the colonel was to the boys. She made him talk of nothing but "the island" all the day long. It was long since she had left it. She wanted to know about everybody, the old negroes, the governor's parties, the regiments that had been there. On her side she had a hundred stories to tell of her own youth, which looked all the brighter for being so far in the distance. They took a drive together in the middle of the day, basking in the sunshine, and as the evening came on they had a roaring fire, and felt themselves in the tropics.

"Shouldn't you like to go back?" Mrs. Lenny said. "If I were as rich as you, Gus, I'd have my estate there, like in the old days, and there I'd spend my winters. With all the money you've got, what would it matter whether it paid or not? You could afford to keep everything up as in the old days."

"But there's the sea. I would do it in a moment,"

Gus said, his brown face lighting up, "but for the sea."

"You would soon get used to the sea—it's nothing. You would get over the sickness in a day, and then it's beautiful. Take me with you one time, Gus, there's a darling. I'd like to see it all again before I die."

"I'll think of it," Gus said: and indeed for the next twenty-four hours he thought of nothing else.

Would it be possible? Some people went to Italy for the winter, why not to Barbadoes? No doubt it was a longer voyage; but then what a different life, what a smoothed and warmed existence, without all this English cold and exercise. He thought of it, neither more nor less, all the next night and all the next day.

And no doubt it was a relief to the house in general when the anniversary was over. A vague lightening, no one could tell exactly what, was in the atmosphere. They had spared no honour to the dead, and now it was the turn of the living. To see Bell and Marie in white frocks was an exhilaration to the house. And it cannot be said that any one was surprised when quite quietly, without any warning, Fairfax walked into the hall

where the children were all assembled next day. He had paid them various flying visits with Paul during the past year, coming for a day or two at Easter, for a little while in the summer. But there was something different, they all thought, about him now. From the moment when Lady Markham had been informed of that one little detail of his circumstances mentioned in a previous chapter, the young man had taken a different aspect in her eyes. He had no longer seemed the careless young fellow of no great account one way or another, very "nice," very simple and humble-minded, the most good-humoured of companions and serviceable of friends, which was how he appeared to all the rest. Mr. Brown had judged justly from the first. The simplicity of the young millionaire had not taken in his experienced faculties. He had always been respectful, obsequious, devoted, long before any one else suspected the truth. How it was, however, that Lady Markham —who was very different from Brown, who considered herself above the vulgar argument of wealth, one to whom the mystic superiority of blood was always discernible, and a rich *roturier* rather less agreeable than a poor one—how it was that she looked upon this

easy, careless, lighthearted young man, who was ready to make himself the servant of everybody, and who made his way through life like an obscure and trusted but careless spectator, rather than an agent of any personal importance—with altogether different eyes after the secret of his wealth had been communicated to her, is what we do not pretend to explain. She said to herself that it did not, could not, make any difference; but she knew all the same that it made an immense difference. Had he been poor as well as a nobody, she would have fought with all her powers against all and every persuasion which might have been brought to bear upon her. She would have accorded him her daughter only as it were at the sword's point, if it had been a matter of life and death to Alice. But when she knew of Fairfax's wealth, Lady Markham's opposition gradually and instinctively died away. She said it was the same as ever; but while she said so, felt the antagonism and the dislike fading out of her mind, why, she did not know. His wealth was something external to himself, made no difference in him; but somehow it made all the difference. Lady Markham from that moment gave up the struggle. She made up

her mind to him as her son. She never thought more about his grandfather. Was this worldly-mindedness, love of money on her part? It was impossible to think so, and yet what was it? She did not herself understand, and who else could do so?

But nobody else had been aware of this change in the standard by which Fairfax was judged, and everybody had treated him easily, carelessly, as before. Only when he appeared to-day the family generally were conscious of a difference. He was more serious, even anxious; he had not an ear for every piece of nonsense as before, but was grave and pre-occupied, not hearing what was said to him. Mrs. Lenny thought she knew exactly what was the matter. He attracted her special sympathies.

"Poor young fellow," she said, "he's come courting, and he might just as well court the fairies at the bottom of the sea. My Lady Markham's not the woman I take her for if she'll ever give her pretty daughter to the likes of him."

"He wants to marry Alice, do you think?" said Gus. "I wonder if *she'll* have nothing to say to him either?"

He was thinking of Dolly, but Mrs. Lenny understood that it was of Lady Markham's opposition he thought.

"I would not answer for the girl herself," Mrs. Lenny said; "but Gus, my dear, you have done harm enough in this house; here's a case in which you might be of use. You have neither chick nor child. Why shouldn't you settle something on your pretty young sister, and let her marry the man she likes?"

"No, I have neither chick nor child," Gus said.

It was not a speech that pleased him, and yet it was very true. He pondered this question with a continually increasing depression in his mind all day. He could not get what he wanted himself, but he might help Fairfax to get it, and make up to him for the imperfections of fortune. Perhaps he might even be asked, for anything he could tell, to serve Paul in the same way. This made the little baronet sad, and even a little irritated. Was this all he had been made a great man for, an English landed proprietor, in order that he should use his money to get happiness for other people, none for himself?

In the meantime Fairfax had followed Alice to the

west room, her mother's favourite place, but Lady Markham was not there.

"I will tell mamma. I am sure she will be glad to see you," Alice said.

"Just one moment—only wait one moment," Fairfax said, detaining her with his hand raised in appeal.

But when she stopped at his entreaty he did not say anything. What answer could she make him? She was standing waiting with a little wonder and much embarrassment. And he said nothing; at last—

"Paul is very well," he said.

"I am very glad. We heard from him yesterday."

Then there was another pause.

"Miss Markham," said Fairfax, "I told your mother myself of *that*, you know, and a great deal more. She was not so—angry as I feared."

"Angry!" Alice laughed a little, but very nervously. "How could she be angry? It was not anything that could——"

What had she been going to say? Something cruel, something that she did not mean.

"Nothing that could—matter to you? I was afraid

not," said Fairfax; "that is what I have been fearing you would say."

"Of course it does not matter to us," said Alice, "how should it? Why should it matter to any one? We are not such poor creatures, Mr. Fairfax. You think you—like us; but you have a very low opinion of us after all."

"No, I don't think I like you. I think something very different. You know what I think," he said. "It all depends upon what you will say. I have waited till yesterday was over and would not say a word; but now the world had begun again. How is it to begin for me? It has not been good for very much in the past; but there might be new heavens and a new earth if—— Alice!" he cried, coming close to her, his face full of emotion, his hands held out.

"Mr. Fairfax!" she said, drawing back a step. "There is mamma to think of. I cannot go against her. I must do what she says."

"Just one word, whatever comes of it, to myself—from you to me—from you to me! And after," he said, breathless, "she shall decide."

Alice did not say any word. Perhaps she had not time for it—perhaps it was not needed. But just then the curtains that half veiled the west room were drawn aside with a fretful motion.

"If it is you who are there, Alice and Fairfax," said Sir Gus—and in his voice, too, there was a fretful tone, "I just want to say one word. I'll make it all right for you. You need not be afraid of mamma. I'll make it all right with her. There! that was all I wanted to say."

When Sir Gus had delivered himself of this little speech he went off again very hastily to the hall, not meaning to disturb any tender scene. The idea had struck him all at once, and he carried it out without giving himself time to think. It did him a little good; but yet he was cross, not like himself, Bell and Marie thought. There was a fire in the hall, too, which the children, coming in hot and flushed from their games, had found great fault with.

"You will roast us all up; you will make us thin and brown like yourself," said Bell, who was always saucy.

"Am I so thin and so brown?" the poor little

gentleman had said. "Yes, I suppose so, not like you, white and red."

"Oh, Bell, how could you talk so, to hurt his feelings?" said little Marie, as they stood by the open door and watched him, standing sunning himself in the warmth.

His brown face looked very discontented, sad, yet soft, with some feeling that was not anger. The little girls began to draw near. For one thing the autumn air was cool in the afternoon, and their white frocks were not so thick as their black ones. They began to see a little reason in the fire. Then Bell, always the foremost, sprang suddenly forward, and clasped his arm in both hers.

"He is quite right to have a fire," she said. "And I hate you for being cross about it, Marie. He is the kindest old brother that ever was. I don't mind being roasted, or any thing else Gus pleases."

"Oh, Gus, you know it wasn't me!" cried Marie, clinging to the other arm.

His face softened as he looked from one to another.

"It wasn't either of you," he said. "I was cross, too.

It is the cold—it is the winter that is coming. One can't help it."

It was not winter that was coming, but still there was a chill little breeze playing about, and the afternoon was beginning to cloud over. Lady Markham coming down stairs was struck by the group in the full light of the fire, which threw a ruddy gleam into the clouded daylight. Something touched her in it. She paused and stood beside them, looking at him kindly.

"You must not let them bother you. You are too kind to them," she said.

Just then the post-bag came in, and Mrs. Lenny along with it, eager, as people who never have any letters to speak of always are, about the post. They all gathered about while the bag was opened and the letters distributed. All that Mrs. Lenny got was a newspaper—a queer little tropical broadsheet, which was of more importance, as it turned out, than all the letters which the others were reading. She put herself by the side of the fire to look over it, while Lady Markham in the window opened her correspondence, and Gus took the stamps off a foreign letter he had

received to give them to Bell and Marie. The little girls were in all the fervour of stamp-collecting. They had a book full of the choicest specimens, and this was just the kind of taste in which Sir Gus could sympathise. He was dividing the stamps between them equally, bending his little brown head to the level of Marie, for Bell was now quite as tall as her brother. Their little chatter was restrained, for the sake of mamma and Colonel Lenny, who were both reading letters, into a soft hum of accompaniment, which somehow harmonised with the ruddy glow of the fire behind them, warming the dull air of the afternoon.

"That will make the German ones complete," Bell was saying. And, "Oh, if I had only a Greek, like Bell, I should be happy!" cried Marie. The little rustle of the newspaper in Mrs. Lenny's hand was almost as loud as their subdued voices. All at once, into the midst of this quiet, there came a cry, a laughing, a weeping, and Mrs. Lenny, jumping up, throwing down the chair she had been sitting on, rushed at Sir Gus, thrusting the paper before him, and grasping his arm with all her force.

"Oh, Gus, Gus, Gus!" she cried, "Oh, Colonel,

look here! Gavestonville estate's in the market. The old house is going to be sold again. Oh, Colonel, why haven't we got any money to buy it, you and me!"

"Give it here," said Sir Gus.

He held it over Marie's head, who stood shadowed by it as under a tent, gazing up at him and holding her stamp in her hand. The little gentleman did not say another word. He paid no attention either to Mrs. Lenny's half hysterics or the calls of little Marie, who had a great deal to say to him about her stamp. His face grew pale with excitement under the brown. He walked straight away from them, up the staircase and to his own room; while even Lady Markham, roused from her letters, stood looking after him and listening to the footstep ringing very clear and steady, but with a sound of agitation in it, step by step up the stairs and along the corridor above. It seemed to them all, young and old, as if something had happened, but what they could not tell.

Sir Gus was very grave at dinner: he did not talk much—and though he was more than usually kind, yet he had not much to say, even to the children, after.

But by this time the interest had shifted in those changeable young heads to Fairfax, who was the last novelty, "engaged to" Alice, a piece of news which made Bell and Marie tremulous with excitement, and excited an instinctive opposition in Roland and Harry. But when the evening was over Gus requested an interview with Lady Markham, and conducted her with great solemnity to the library, though it was a room he did not love. There he placed himself in front of the fire, contemplating her with a countenance quite unlike his usual calm.

"I have something very important to tell you," he said. "I have taken a resolution, Lady Markham." And in every line of the little baronet's figure it might be seen how determined this resolution was.

"Tell me what it is," Lady Markham said, as he seemed to want her to say something. And then Sir Gus cleared his throat as if he were about to deliver a speech.

"It is—but first let me tell you that I promised to make it all right for those young people, Alice and Fairfax. I hope you'll let them be happy. It seems

to me that to be happy when you are young, when you can have it is the best thing. I promise to make it all right with you. I'll settle upon her whatever you think necessary."

"You have a heart of gold," said Lady Markham, much moved, "and they will be as grateful to you as if they wanted it. Mr. Fairfax," she said (and Lady Markham, though she was not mercenary, could not not help saying it with a little pride), "Mr. Fairfax is very rich. He has a great fortune; he can give Alice everything that could be desired—though all the same, dear Gus, they will be grateful to you."

"Ah!" said Sir Gus, with a blank air of surprise like a man suddenly stopped by a blank wall. He made a dead stop and looked at her, then resumed. "I have taken a resolution, Lady Markham. I think I never ought to have come here; at all events it has not done me very much good, has it, nor any one else? And I daren't face another winter. I think I should die. Perhaps if I had married and that sort of thing it might have been better. It is too late to think of that now."

"Why too late?" said Lady Markham. Her heart

had begun to beat loudly; but she would not be outdone in generosity, and indeed nothing had been more kind than poor Gus. She determined to fight his battle against himself. "Why too late? You must not think so. You will not find the second winter so hard as the first—and as for marrying——"

"Yes, that's out of the question, Lady Markham; and at first I never meant to, because of Paul. So here is what I am going to do. You heard what old Aunt Katie said. The old house is for sale again; the old place where she was born and I was born, my uncle's old place that he had to sell, where I am as well known as Paul is at Markham. I am going back there; don't say a word. It's better for me, and better for you, and all of us. I'll take the old woman with me, and I'll be as happy as the day is long."

Here Gus gave a little gulp. Lady Markham got up and went towards him with her hand extended in anxious deprecation, though who can tell what a storm was going on in her bosom, of mingled reluctance and expectation—an agitation beyond words. He too raised his hand to keep her silent.

"Don't say anything," he said; "I've made up my mind; it will be a great deal better. Paul can come back, and I dare say he'll marry little Dolly. You can say I hope he will, and make her a good husband. And since Fairfax is rich, why that is all right without me. Send for Paul, my lady, and we'll settle about the money; for I must have money you know. I must have my share. And I'd like to give a sort of legacy to the little girls. They're fond of me, really, those two children, they are now, though you might not think it."

"We are all fond of you," said Lady Markham, with tears.

"Well, perhaps that is too much to expect; but you have all been very kind. Send for Paul, and make him bring the lawyer, and we'll get it all settled. I shall go out by the next steamer," said Sir Gus, after a little pause, recovering his usual tone. "No more of this cold for me. I shall be king at Gavestonville, as Paul will be here. I don't think, Lady Markham, I have anything more to say."

"But," she cried clinging to her duty. "*But*—I don't know what to say to you. Gus—Gus!"

"I have made up my mind," said the little gentleman with great dignity, and after that there was not another word to say.

But there was a great convulsion in Markham when Sir Gus went away. The children were inconsolable. And Dolly stood by the Rectory gate when his carriage went past to the railway with the tears running down her cheeks. He had the carriage stopped at that last moment, and stepped out to speak to her, letting his fur cloak fall on the road.

"Marry Paul, my dear," he said, "that will be a great deal better than if you had married me. But you may give me a kiss before I go away."

There was a vague notion in Sir Gus's mind that little Dolly had wanted to marry him, but that he had discouraged the idea. He spoke in something of the same voice to the children as they saw him go away, watched him driving off. "I can't take you with me," he said, "but you shall come and see me." And so, with great dignity and satisfaction, Sir Gus went away.

Thus Paul Markham had his property again when he had given up all thought of it; but the little gentleman who is the greatest man in Barbadoes has not the slightest intention of dying to oblige him, and in all likelihood the master of Markham will never be Sir Paul.

THE END.

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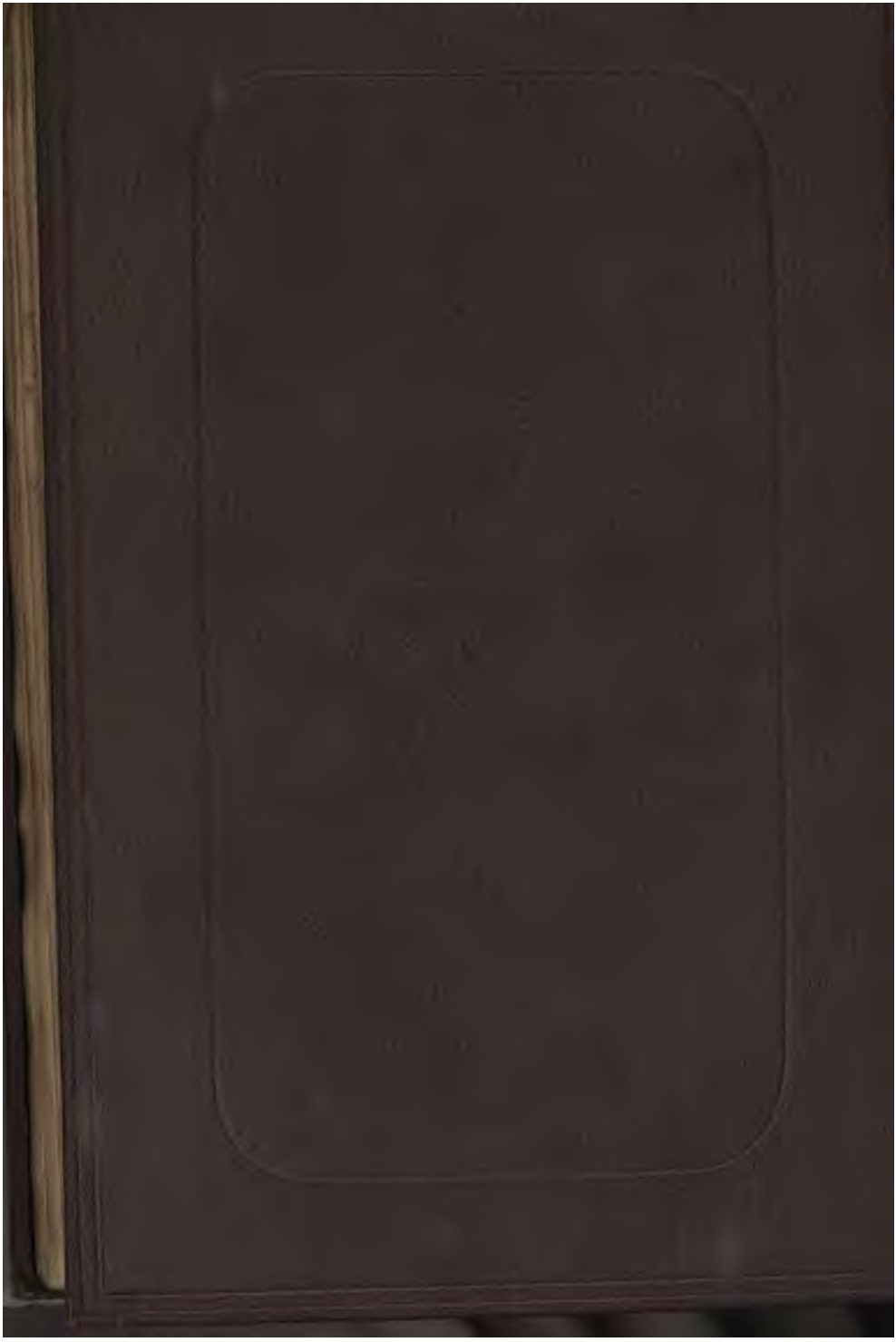
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